Mrs. Boff

(See p. 33

"I AM HURT!" HE GASPED

HE PEL LANT

THE RED LANE

A ROMANCE OF THE BORDER

BY

HOLMAN DAY

AUTHOR OF
"KING SPRUCE" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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L-O

TO MY DEAR FRIEND

BURTON SMITH, A.M.

WHO, AS CHIEF DEPUTY UNITED STATES MARSHAL FOR THE DISTRICT OF MAINE, DURING QUARTER OF A CENTURY, HAS KNOWN IN ITS VERITY THE BORDER LIFE WITH WHICH I HAVE TAKEN THE LIBERTIES OF ROMANCE

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THE RED LANE

I

WHEN EVANGELINE CAME HOME

THE Red Lane is neither road nor route. It is an institution—it is smuggling. Its thousand avenues are now here, now there.

The Red Lane crossed the border at Beaulieu's Place this night.

The Lane was blatantly open. They who came along it were unabashed, unafraid.

Great wains rumbled and creaked on the hard clay road which led through Monarda clearing. Teamsters shouted at straining horses, and bellowed their songs. From east to west the procession moved—from Canada into the States.

The plot had been ripened carefully, the word had gone out to the smugglers, the season's "killing" was on in earnest.

There were potatoes, there were oats and general produce of farms—commodities cheap on one side of the line, but made valuable by the magic of passing an iron monument set in a granite block at the side of a woodland highway. The iron post marked where free trade ended and the tariff began. It might be said to mark the tomb where Reciprocity was buried! It was the boundary post.

Droves of cattle shuffled along the clay road in the gloom. Sheep and horses came, too.

Given five hundred miles of frontier in a customs district—woods and water at the edge of things—and deputies cannot frustrate all the tricks of the smugglers.

Deputies are few and scattered. The smugglers are many and persistent. And their stratagems are many, too. About once in so often the great *coup* is executed—the Red Lane is thrown wide. No lawbreaker is furtive and fearful that night.

This night it monopolized the highway through Monarda clearing past Beaulieu's Place.

The deputies had herded and run north chasing rumor. They had been carefully fooled. The smugglers are good for at least two new ruses in a season. And when it was certain that the deputies were chasing the false scent in the north, then promptly along the clay road of Monarda was the Red Lane opened, and the oats, the potatoes, the sheep, the cattle, the boxes of this, and the barrels of that which the smugglers had been hiding at points of vantage for weeks, all came across in gay and noisy procession.

Beaulieu's Place is an institution on the border as well as the Red Lane, for the Monarda road is a thoroughfare which unites populous sections.

One of the popular "Come-all-ye" songs of the border celebrates Beaulieu's Place. Men who ride high on the joggling seats of the great wains bawl it lustily and with a zest of declaration which indicates that its sentiments are approved.

Come all ye teamster lads so bold, oh, come along with me!
We'll whoa the nags at Beaulieu's Place where the morson flows
so free.
Give us a drink of good white rum and we do not care a damn
For all of the Yankee customs sneaks who work for Uncle Sam.

HOME

Red Lane,
Red Lane—
That's the road for me.
And not one cent of duty
For the country of the free.

Beaulieu's broad door of planks was wide open. The light of smoky lamps splashed upon the gloom at door and dingy windows.

Teams halted in the broad yard and, while the sweating horses puffed, the drivers flocked in noisy comradeship in the big, low room where Vetal Beaulieu sold to all who were thirsty.

Men who were not teamsters were there. There were woodsmen who were spending their money in prolonged debauch. Little knots of them clung together, wavering on unsteady feet, wailing hoarse choruses.

One group was persecuting a "jumper"—a French Canadian who leaped and screamed and flailed his arms about him whenever a tormentor yelled sharp command to "Strike!" When the "jumper" drove his fist against some unwary man's face, great laughter convulsed the bystanders.

Tobacco smoke in whorls and strata drifted above the heads of the men.

Only one man in the room was silent, sober, saturnine. This was Vetal Beaulieu, sturdy little publican with bowed legs, a crisp, grizzled beard masking all his lower face. His hard eyes took all in. His hand, dripping with liquors, stuffed bills and coins into his trousers pockets.

There were crackers in plates upon a huge truck, or table on wheels. This was in the center of the big room. There was cheese in plates. There were many bottles and a few jugs on the wheeled table. Whisky in queerly blown glass bottles which resembled dumb-bells, gin in

high-shouldered bottles, rum in tall, goose-necked bottles which were labeled "Vieux Rhum." There were decanters, glasses, and the impedimenta of a bar, all disposed on the wheeled table, or truck.

The truck was astride a line done in dingy paint. The big room was bisected by that line.

One end of the room was decorated with English flags which surrounded a chromo of the ruling British sovereign.

The other end of the room displayed a picture of the President of the United States, draped liberally with dingy specimens of the Stars and Stripes.

Such was Beaulieu's Place, most widely celebrated of all the border resorts. Its habitués knew that the dingy line of paint marked the boundary between two countries. The broad, low building squatted squarely on the line. It was not a mere whim on Beaulieu's part which located it thus impartially. That wheeled truck with its load of liquors suggested a reason.

Prohibition held sway on one side of the line.

There were the King's excise tolls on the other.

Only once in the history of Beaulieu's Place had the officers of both nations been able to agree and descend simultaneously. Then, after dividing startled gaze between them, Vetal had centered his truck on the median line of the room, straddled that line himself, folded his arms and waited. He reckoned safely on the jealousy of nations. The officers had fallen into such prompt dispute over honors and spoils of war that they finally departed their several ways, leaving Vetal astride his paint streak, his stock of liquors unmolested.

"Balance" Beaulieu, so some of the folks nicknamed him.

They did not apply that epithet in his hearing. Men bespoke him softly as one having wealth and one who

pressed the heavy thumb of a mortgage on many scores of little farms up and down the broad valley of the St. John.

The Monarda stage was late that night. Its route was from the east toward the west, from the Province into the States. Here and there its grumbling driver took advantage of a broad place and lashed his horses around a heavy wagon or bumped past through the gutter, risking axles and wheels. Droves of animals blocked the road, bewildered in the night, stupidly crowding together in the middle of the highway.

The old stage-driver, weazened French Canadian, frequently shuttled his chin over his shoulder and apologized to his one passenger.

"I forget and talk some bad talk, Mam'selle. But it's very much trouble on the Monarda road this night. Those who are breaking the law, they don't care if the mails do not get through on time."

The passenger did not reply. From the moment the driver had told her that these men whose cattle and teams filled the road were smugglers, she had cowered in the shadow of one of the coach's old curtains. She could not see their faces in the June night. But they were lawbreakers. They inspired fear. The drovers yelled oaths at their charges. The teamsters beat their horses and cursed delays.

"We shall do much better after we get past Beaulieu's Place, Mam'selle. They do not keep to the highroad when they get past there and are in the Yankee country. Ah, then they hide in the woods and follow the narrow lanes. We shall have the highroad to ourselves when we get past Beaulieu's Place. We shall hurry and make up the time we have lost," he chattered, consolingly.

"I have told you that I am to stop at Monsieur Beaulieu's."

"Ah, but that is not at Beaulieu's Place. No, that cannot be, Mam'selle. No, you are to stop at Beaulieu's of the mill—Felix Beaulieu's, eh?"

"I do not know Felix Beaulieu. It is at Vetal Beaulieu's where I shall get down from the stage."

They were climbing a hill, and the horses were walking. He had taken this opportunity to talk to her, for the road was clear for a space.

He turned squarely around and stared, trying to see her face.

"It's the queer mistake you have made, I think," he assured her. "There is only one Vetal Beaulieu on the Monarda road, and you would not be going there."

"But Vetal Beaulieu is my father—and I *am* going there."

He snapped his gaze away and was silent for a time, wrinkling his brow with the air of one who is trying to remember just what he had been saying.

At last, without turning his head, he asked, meekly: "You have been away from home, eh, some time, Mam'selle? I have drive past Beaulieu's many times, and I have never seen you."

"I have been at the convent school of St. Basil for many years—ever since my mother died. I was a very little girl when she died. I have never been home since. My father said it was better for me at the school. He is a very good father—he has been to visit me many times."

"So he has now sent for you to come home, eh?" he inquired, breaking another long silence.

She smiled and indulged his curiosity, understanding her people.

"My father did not send for me. But I have learned all the lessons the good sisters can teach me. It is the duty of a daughter to come home and make that home

happy for a father who has been alone all these years. I have not said I was coming. It is to be a surprise."

He nodded, gazing straight ahead.

"Yes, it is to be a surprise, Mam'selle."

"I have offered to come home before this. I have wanted to be of some help to my father. But he has said I must not sacrifice for his sake. Yet, it is no sacrifice for a daughter to make home happier for her father."

"It is a quiet place, that St. Basil convent—quiet place and far from here, eh, Mam'selle?"

"Yes."

The horses had topped the hill and were trotting down the other side. There were more teams ahead, more troubles, and he did not speak until the road was clear once again.

"They are not very interest, eh, in the news, those good sisters and the girls at the convent of St. Basil? They do not talk about what goes on outside?"

"There is no gossip there, Monsieur."

"But I think they must say something to you about your father—how Vetal Beaulieu has made the very much money—how he is the rich man?" he floundered.

"No, I only know he is a good man who has given me education and has made my life happy. Now I am going home to help him."

The old driver's narrow limits of tactful inquiry had been reached. He flicked his horses, and they hurried on. He muttered constantly, but the rattling of the wheels did not let her hear.

"I think the good sisters of St. Basil have not teach her something she ought to know," was the burden of his soliloquy. "For, if she thinks that Vetal Beaulieu is the fine man, she will have the heartbreak before this night is over."

When the stage reached Monarda clearing he steered his horses through the tangle of heavy wagons and halted near the door. Inside, voices babbled, men howled choruses, laughter and oaths and obscenity mingled.

"I am very sorry, Mam'selle," said the old driver. He had climbed down and was offering her his hand. "I have try to think something which I could say. But I am only a poor man—and Vetal Beaulieu is rich and has a mortgage on my little house. So I have thought it best to say short words to his daughter about him. I am sorry, Mam'selle! I have brought you to Vetal Beaulieu's house."

She stared at the dingy windows where the yellow light splashed the night. Dismay, astonishment, incertitude, even frank disbelief, struggled together in her countenance.

"I tell you the truth. I have brought you to your home. You will find your father inside."

She came down slowly, clinging to his hand. He placed on the ground the little bag which contained the scanty possessions of a convent girl.

"I have my mails, and I am late, Mam'selle. Your father is within. I must hurry."

He leaped back upon his seat and drove away with the haste of a man who fears what may happen. He had no wish to appear before Beaulieu as the charioteer who had whisked that daughter home without warning.

She stood outside, hesitating. A flicker of light from the door shone on her face. A man who came out singing, beating his whip-handle across his palm, stopped and swore amazedly.

"Thousand thunders!" he panted, speaking in Acadian *patois*. "If you are not a June fairy, fresh lighted here, then you are the handsomest mademoiselle on the border."

He put out his hand, but she avoided his grasp and

hurried into the big room. Better inside where the tumult was and where her father must be, than the outside in the dark where men leered and said the first words of passion of man for maid she had ever heard.

The swinging smoke of the room clouded the vision of the startled eyes with which she searched their faces when they all turned to goggle at her. Suddenly there was a cry, a man's yelp of astonishment. Silver coins rattled and rolled on the floor. Vetal Beaulieu, his hard eyes popping, had dropped a handful of money he had been conveying to his pocket. He stood transfixed, his wet fingers outspread, his jaw sagging.

"I am Evangeline Beaulieu," she quavered. Her smarting eyes could not distinguish him in the smoke. "I am looking for my father."

A young man leaped forward, seized her hand, and led her toward Vetal, who stood without motion and without words. When she came to him the father put out to her his hand, odorous with liquor.

"Is this—is this our—home, father?" she cried.

He led her to a door which opened into another part of the house.

"I shall talk with you soon, Evangeline," he said. His shaking voice marked the tumult of his spirit.

When she was gone and the door was closed behind her, he faced them, leaning against the door.

"I have had the surprise," he told them, brokenly, his face white, his eyes avoiding theirs. "My girl has come home from St. Basil. The place is closed for this night."

They protested noisily; but he went among them, insisting with dogged determination. The drunken ones he pushed out-of-doors. He buffeted those who tried to fight him off. The soberer teamsters went away after a time. But for an hour the talk was loud, the uproar was

brutal, and afterward men lingered outside and bawled coarse insults at Vetal Beaulieu, barricaded in his house. For the first time in the memory of those men of the border the door of Beaulieu's Place was closed against a man who had money in his fist and wanted to buy liquor.

But Vetal Beaulieu was now face to face with a girl who had become a woman after those few moments of shame and agony. His money had educated her, had given her breadth of intellect, love of honor, deep religious feeling, poise, and character. He was a cowering and guilty Frankenstein, menaced by that which his dollars had raised up. Before her his spirit and his money-greed took fright. His own excuse which had served his conscience through the years—that he had taken toll for her sake from those who fared along the Monarda highway to provide for her future—seemed weak excuse now when he stammered it—her eyes searching his soul.

Men who battered at the plank door and were not answered listened at the cracks, heard voices of appeal, rebuke, and protestation, and went away, not understanding. At last the voices ceased.

One who arrived singing, "We'll whoa our nags at Beaulieu's Place, where the morson flows so free," swung his cart so that he could peer from his high seat through one of the windows. He saw Vetal Beaulieu seated beside his truck, alone. Beaulieu would not open his door.

II

THE COURIER OF THREE THOUSAND SHEEP

VETAL BEAULIEU was still wide awake when the first sleepy cheeping of birds hinted that dawn was at hand. He sat in his hard chair, his elbows on his knees. He lifted his head and, with red-lidded eyes, saw the gray light of earliest morning smear the sky between the crowding spruces which grid-ironed his eastern windows.

Solitary, in the dim spaciousness of the big general room of Beaulieu's Place, he had cursed, he had stamped about in the night's silences, he had wept; then he had cursed again, only to melt into noisy tears once more. He had inherited the mercurial temperament of his Acadian forebears. From extreme to extreme of emotion his tumultuous feelings carried him.

Now and then in the night the smoky oil-lamp had given signal to those who traveled along the Monarda highway that some one was awake within Beaulieu's house. They had beaten upon the door and shouted impatiently when Vetal did not lift the bar. Beaulieu growled oaths and sat with fingers thrust into his gray hair, his palms against his ears.

When the rattle of the carts was dulled by distance and died, the hush of a forest night settled on the house in Monarda clearing. The shrilling of June frogs in Hagas swamp was stilled. The single lamp's flame burned redly

within its smoky chimney. Mice came out of the walls and nosed warily at cigar butts and litter on the unswept floor. When Vetal wiped his eyes and found voice and cursed and stamped about, they scurried away into their cracks. When he was still again, sitting with elbows on his knees, they came out and nibbled at cracker-crumbs here and there.

Alone in the night he thought upon his mortgages and his estates, but such thoughts did not cheer him. Men had heard Vetal Beaulieu curse, as he had cursed this night in the solemnity of the silences before the dawn. But no man had ever seen him weep. He clutched his fingers in his hair and pondered!

He had pride of race, Beaulieu had! His forebears were of the Grand Pré of the Acadians, of the Basin of Minas

Beaulieu's folks had not been transported to the South by the hated English. Only the sheep of the Grand Pré flock had given themselves into the hands of the oppressors, he was accustomed to boast. Vetal Beaulieu's great-grandfather had been a lion and had resisted—had escaped. With his family and his stock, by trail and by raft, he had ascended the broad St. John into the fastnesses of the wilderness and, with others as bold as he, had founded a new Acadia. In his barn were horses whose ancestors had cropped the close grass of France—he had cows whose strain had been preserved in straight descent from dams brought off the Isle of Jersey. He paid his debts promptly—he had saved his money, he reflected with pride. He had met all comers without regret, without shame, in his business. Beaulieus had kept the village wine-shops in ancient Normandy.

But he forgot his property and his pride as he sat there in the hush of midnight and later in the dim early hours.

Then the fresh new day began to stir the leaves with first sighs of breezes, though the east was not yet gray. But he did not heed the world out-of-doors. The windows were close shut. The stale odors of liquors and the scent of dead tobacco mingled. The sweet dews of morning trickled on the panes outside, and the cool scents of Monarda forest were all about, but he did not open to let them in. The staleness within-doors seemed to suit his mood; the foul air, confined there, was as bitter as his thoughts. The lamp's flame had been dying. Now it winked out, leaving stench of charred wick to mingle with the malodorous atmosphere.

To one keeping vigil, absorbed in troubled thoughts, it is night so long as the light of the evening before stays burning. The lapse of time is not noted. Vetal lifted his head. The windows showed him that the first gray of dawn was in the skies. He heard now and then the drowsy chirp of birds. He rose and staggered about a bit. Fumbling in the dim light he poured a dram for himself. It was white rum, and fiery. But it seemed to him that its fires suited his hot resolution. For he had resolved!

He muttered, moving about the room, making sure that the window-catches were fastened, yawning even as he cursed, continuing his sullen monologue. Then, as faint, almost, as the ticking of the old clock on the shelf above the truck, he heard the dull clip-clop of a horse's hoofs far down the broad white road of clay. The rider was hurrying his animal, for the sound grew louder with each second and its staccato showed that the horse was galloping wildly. Before Beaulieu had finished his round of the big room the horse had stopped at the broad door.

The master of Beaulieu's Place paid no attention to the first knocking, though it was sharp and insistent—the

beating of a whip-handle on the oak planks of the door. It continued.

The horse had raced up from the Province side of the boundary. Vetal, growling, his forehead wrinkling with apprehension, pushed his truck along the floor to the American side of the painted line. Evidently the man outside heard the rumble of the iron wheels.

"Open up, Vetal! It's Dave Roi! I hear you. Open up!"

Beaulieu threw the wooden bar out of its slot, and the door swung wide. The cool breath of the dawn was waiting there at the threshold and rushed in upon the tainted atmosphere of the big room. The man who had knocked came, too, with the impatience of one to whom minutes are precious.

"It takes you a long time to wake up."

"No, by gar, it takes me a long time to go to sleep," retorted Vetal, sourly. "I have not closed my eyes this night."

"Neither have I, but there are many better things in this life than sleeping." He laughed with the boisterous zest of one who comes in from the flush of the morning, full of the joy of living. "Sleep winters, Vetal! Sleep while the good priest preaches. Sleep when there's nothing else to do. But, when there's fun or business on, don't waste your time snuffing feathers."

He smacked gloved palm against Beaulieu's shrinking shoulder and strode to the truck. He poured liquor for himself with the freedom of one sure of his ground in Beaulieu's Place. He drank and tossed the last drops from the glass upon the floor—an instinctive libation according to the old Acadian habit.

Vetal watched his guest intently. He puckered his eyes and looked Roi up and down. He acted like one

who has felt called on to make a new appraisal of a friend. He seemed to be satisfying his doubts, assuring himself that certain things were so.

He saw a young man who was brusquely alert, full of the arrogance of strength, telling the world by the upcock of his black mustache, the tilt of his cap, the trim neatness of his corduroy riding-dress, that Dave Roi had full belief in himself. One subtler in analysis than Vetal Beaulieu might have disregarded the externals and seen something more than mere confident youth in the air of this rider of the night. The stare he now turned on Vetal was hard and suddenly suspicious. His black eyes glittered. There were telltale lines about those eyes.

"What is it? Say it!"

"I say nothing, but I only think that you are a mighty fine-looking young man," stated Vetal, promptly and somberly, as though replying to some doubts he had been entertaining. "And I think that something must be the matter with that girl what throw you away—if there is some girl that throw you over."

"Look here, what kind of lies have you been hearing about me?" Just then the subtle analyst would have been still less impressed by Dave Roi's externals.

"I hear no lies. I say that you look very good and that some fine girl—any girl would say so," insisted Vetal, continuing his inspection of the young man in question in a way which made the subject uneasy.

"I know what you mean, Vetal. But, look here, you can't afford to believe everything you hear about a fellow along this border. Man to man, now, what's a chap going to do when the girl herself puts up her finger? Ah, Vetal, when your Evangeline comes home to us, when the priest says the fine words, then you'll see how I can straighten out. Now, man to man, don't blame me for all you hear."

"What I hear I forget. I was not talking to you about what I hear," muttered Vetal. When the young man had spoken the girl's name Vetal's countenance twisted with a grimace in which anger and sorrow mingled.

"I'm glad you haven't been sitting up all night worrying about *me*," remarked Roi, recovering his self-possession.

At the first words of Vetal he had shown the quick alarm of one expecting an accusation of serious portent. His uneasiness had been increasing ever since his arrival. He had found Beaulieu red-eyed and sullen after a night's vigil. The man had been staring him out of countenance. Vetal had begun upon a peculiar subject for discourse at that time in the morning.

"A fellow has to flit about a bit while he's waiting for the real girl," protested Roi. He was taking courage from Vetal's assurances. "Have all your foolishness over with before marriage—that's what I believe in. I ride here and I ride there, Vetal. You know what the border is! I kiss and gallop away—and nobody is harmed. If anybody comes to you with any other kind of a story it will be a lie: I've been waiting all these years for your girl, Vetal. She's the one for me. Oh yes! No one else counts. And it can't be much longer that she'll keep me waiting, eh? The sisters at St. Basil must have told her all there is to know!" He was chattering eagerly, as one anxious to justify himself.

"They tell a girl a great deal at St. Basil," muttered Beaulieu, walking to the door, his stubby fingers clutched into his grizzled beard, tears starting to his eyes. But anger succeeded grief, as wrath had followed tears while he was alone in the watches of the night. He came back into the room. He stamped about his truck.

"Maybe, eh, they teach girls to be ashamed of good fathers who worked hard all the days to lay up money

that makes all the girl's life easy for her." He shook his finger at the liquors as he marched about them. "My great-grandfather kept his wine-shop, Dave Roi, and he never lost the respect. Our people have the respect for the wine-shop. It is good for the people."

Roi was staring at Beaulieu. He did not understand this outburst.

"And I am not a bad man because I sell what the people want to buy."

"What's the matter with you, Vetal? You can't afford to pay any attention to what those infernal Yankees say about rum-selling. They're only hypocrites. They like to come here and buy. Let 'em talk. What if you don't pay Yankee duties—d—n 'em—and what if you do dodge the excise over here?" Roi had passed the painted line, crossing the border into the Province. "That's why you can give the good people the better liquors. You and I can grin and let all of 'em talk. We stand together, you and I do, Vetal! I pay no attention if they lie about you. Pay no attention if they lie about me."

"And I give my good money all to her some day!" wailed Vetal, with what seemed irrelevance to Roi. "She shall have it, and you shall have it."

"It will come in handy, of course, but I shall have plenty of my own," stated the young man, airily. He marched to and fro. He shook his fist at the Stars and Stripes draped on the wall of the room. "I cleaned up ten thousand dollars last year, Vetal, right under their peaked Yankee noses. I've got three thousand sheep back there on the road right now. I'm riding in ahead of them. Here you and I have been wasting time! We've been talking about nothing for ten minutes. Let's get down to business! I say I've got three thousand bleaters back

there on the road. You don't know anything, do you? No tips, eh?"

Beaulieu glanced at the dirty window in the east end of the room. The morning light was flushing it.

"You'd better not run 'em across in daylight—that's my tip," said Vetal.

"Oh, I've got all the Yankee hound dogs of deputies running north of here, chasing a shadow," retorted Roi with a toss of his hand. "I was the one who opened the Lane here last night—it was my scheme! They run in a pack, and a snap of the finger starts 'em when you know how to do it. I'm only afraid of some straggling idiot. You haven't seen any signs, eh?"

Beaulieu shook his head.

Roi rattled on, still marching to and fro.

"I'll let the sheep come on. I ought to have been here at midnight, Vetal. I planned it that way, of course. But hell is in that flock back there, and some sneak poisoned my two best dogs last week. We have come slow. But across they must come, Vetal. They ought to be here in ten minutes."

He went out-of-doors and listened. The sky was red in deep hues near the horizon, but the sun was still below the hills, and the highway under the trees stretched dimly in its vistas east and west. The horse which had brought the chief of the Monarda smugglers was hitched to the iron post that marked the line between the countries. Roi went to the animal and was about to mount.

Beaulieu called to him. Vetal stood in the broad door. The anxiety in his tones and the expression on his face indicated that he had something especial to say.

"I haven't any time now, Vetal! Save your gossip."

Beaulieu stepped out of the door and gazed furtively at a window in the far end of his house. The curtain was

drawn tightly. He turned to Roi, his finger on his lips. Then he pointed to the open door.

"You'd better step in, Dave," he advised, and led the way.

Roi followed, for there was a warning significance in the man's words and acts.

"A spy in there, eh?" he demanded, when they were back in the big room. "Why in the devil's name didn't you say so at the start-off?"

"I'd know what to say about a spy—I'd know what to tell you, and tell you quick. But it's worse than a spy—worse than a hound deputy, Dave!" His voice broke in sudden emotion and he began to plod around his truck. "It's Evangeline—my girl, Evangeline! She is home from St. Basil. She is there in the room."

Tears were on his cheeks.

There was a flash of sudden astonishment in Roi's eyes.

"Evangeline home!" Then he recovered his self-possession. "I must say, Vetal, you don't act like a proud father getting back his daughter after all these years."

"She was not to come now. I did not tell her to come now. She came without the warning."

He beat his hand upon his breast. His voice was hoarse with grief and anger.

"She stand and tell me that I shame her—I disgrace the good name of the Beaulieus. She talk like that to her own father, who has been so good to her. I have work hard all the years. I have pile up the money!" In his distress his Acadian tongue became careless of its English. "I do not sleep all the night. I sit here and sorrow, for my own girl have come back home to tell her poor father that he have disgrace her. Dave, I have not sleep. I think I never sleep some more!"

"Do you mean to say, Vetal, that a girl eighteen years

old hasn't found out till now that you have made all your money peddling rum off that truck—hadn't ever heard of Beaulieu's Place on this border?"

"She go on the convent of St. Basil when her mother die, when she was a baby of four years; you know that yourself," bleated Vetal. "But I am not ashame because I have sold my rum. My great-grandfather have keep his wine-shop."

"Well, selling wine in old Normandy and selling rum off a truck where you beat the customs and the excise both may strike some fussy folks as different propositions," drawled Roi, with a flash of sardonic humor. "I don't lay it up against you, Vetal. Understand that. I believe that every cent we knock out of the d—d Yankee customs is honest money for us. But a girl right out of a convent isn't able to understand the business side of things. You simply have got to put it up to her straight and right! She's an Acadian girl. She'll understand."

"She say I must smash my bottles, close my doors, clean out my place, make the pilgrimage to the shrine, do the novena for every year I have been in the wickedness, and give my money to the poor as she shall tell me to give it," wailed the publican.

"Oh, see here! That's all nonsense. That's only a silly convent notion. She'll wake up. If she doesn't wake up—well, you know how to bring your own daughter into line, don't you? If you don't, then you'll be the first Acadian who didn't understand how to handle his women folk."

Vetal drove his hand across his face. He swept away the tears.

"I say 'go' to my wife and she go—and she come when I say 'come'! That's my wife." He vibrated his clinched fist over his head.

"Run your own house—that's right! Of course I don't believe in being a brute where women are concerned, Vetal, but you can't afford to let a girl be foolish. Rise up and be boss, and the thing will straighten out all right."

He turned away impatiently.

"Say, this gab isn't going to do for me, Vetal. I've got three thousand sheep piling along back here. I can't waste any more time talking about a girl's whim. She had no business running home from the convent till you had it understood with her. But, now that she's here make her toe the crack. A woman never has any use for a man who doesn't whirl her into line."

He started for the door. But Vetal rushed after him. He seized Roi's arm and dragged him back.

"But I've got to get out of here, I say," insisted the young man. "This job of mine can't wait even for a sweetheart. I'll be back later in the day, Vetal. I'll have a good talk with her. Both of us will talk to her."

"She tell me last night that if you are a smuggler, as she has heard, she will not marry you—she will not speak to you again."

Roi whirled and scowled on Vetal.

"She has been hearing something, eh?"

"And she said more than that," the father went on. "She said you are not the young man for her to marry, anyway. I don't understand, Dave. I look at you. You are a fine young man. You have make money. That girl what throw you away don't know what she do."

Roi's face flushed, and his eyes narrowed. He did not require the restraining clutch of Vetal Beaulieu now. He strode back into the room.

"You don't mean to say she said that in earnest!"

"Listen, Dave Roi! I look at her when she talk to me last night. I say to myself, over and over: 'This is only

my girl Evangeline. Bah, I shall not allow her to talk to me like that.' But, my God, Dave Roi, when I look at her standing there she is not my young girl any more. She is—she is—I can't tell you what it is she is—but I am frightened when she look at *me!*" He began to weep again. "I am frightened, for she is not my girl—my Acadian girl like the other girls who obey and do not ask questions."

Dave Roi did not understand what this halting speech tried to explain. That this father, accustomed to the ancient obedience of children, unquestioning subservience to the will of the elders, had all at once been faced by something which had upset all his aims and hopes and dreams was not grasped in its full extent by the cynical young man. Roi simply understood that Evangeline Beaulieu had come home and had dragged her father over the coals on account of the traffic by which he earned his money. It seemed to him that a little discipline might easily remedy that matter. That reference to himself Roi thought he understood better. His face grew hard.

"I'm going to stop long enough to tell you one thing, Vetal. I keep my eyes and ears open on this border. That's a part of my business. I didn't think this amounted to much when I first heard it. But if Evangeline is talking about me, as you tell me she is, then it's time to speak out. They say she has been having a beau on the sly at the convent."

"I believe no such thing!" raged Vetal. "It is too strict at St. Basil. There can no young man come courting there. Even you—you who shall marry her, and so the sisters know—even you can see her only in the big room with the sisters sitting by. She can have no beau."

"It is strict there—but thoughts can go out over the walls even when a girl cannot," growled Roi. "A girl

can fall in love with a fellow even if she has never touched his hand. And if she is thinking about a fellow all the time she might just as well be hugged in his arms, so far as being worth anything to another fellow goes."

"She shall marry you," blustered Vetal.

"I don't need to force any girl to marry me, but I'll tell you this: there's no Yankee customs spy who can carry off the girl who has been promised to me."

"She is yours, and you shall have her," insisted the father. "But she has come home with the strange ways—with the queer ideas. So I warn you, Dave. She will look at you like she looked at me. She will say to you, 'I will not be marry to the man what breaks the country's law!' I wish you don't drive your sheep across the line to-day."

"But I'm not going to hang up a drove of three thousand sheep to please a girl," declared Roi, with an oath. "I say they've got to be kept moving."

"But I have lie to her. If she was ashame of her old father I say to myself she must not be ashame of the man I have pick out for her to marry," cried Vetal. "So I tell her you don't smuggle. I have lie to her. You shall marry her so that some sneak shall not steal her away. Turn back your sheep, Dave. If she know I have lie to her it will be very bad for a poor old father."

There was almost frenzy of appeal in Beaulieu's voice. The picture of his daughter rose before him as she had stood there in the room the night before, cowing him by her woman's poise, shaming him by her sorrowful accusations, wringing his simple heart by her grief that her father should be such as she had found him.

But even while Beaulieu pleaded there came a strange sound from the woods to the east. The purr of innumerable little feet on the hard clay road—that was the sound.

There were broken, dust-choked quaverings of the complaints of weary sheep; there were tremulous wailings of lambs. Above all there was one insistent sound—the queer, rustling shuffle of many moving bodies.

Roi swung away from the coaxing, patting hands of Vetal. He hurried to the door.

"She may as well drop fool notions and get used to her husband's business," the smuggler called over his shoulder. "It's too late to call off this deal now, Beaulieu. Here comes a clean profit of a thousand dollars—wool, hides, and chops—all under their own steam. And as for me, I'm not ashamed of having any girl see me turn this trick."

He marched out into the roadway and watched the approach of the flock, casting side glances at the curtained window.

And Vetal Beaulieu slunk out and stood beside his son-in-law-elect.

III

BY THE HANDS OF BEAULIEU'S GIRL

THE sheep came on, crowding, bleating, thrusting woolly bodies together, their trotting hoofs purring on the hard roadway. The undulating press of shaggy backs filled the Monarda thoroughfare. Two collie dogs with lolling tongues scurried here and there on the outskirts, menacing stragglers with sharp barks, nipping at vagrant hocks. Now and then the dogs crossed the field of moving wool, springing from back to back. Far behind, hardly more than shadows in the haze of fine dust from the clay road, were men with long staves. The men were shouting commands to the eager dogs, and yelped angrily at the laggards or truants among the sheep.

"You take the big chance this day—you take the big chance," complained Beaulieu. He scowled apprehensively when the clamor swelled; he peered under his hand to the west, searching with squinting eyes among the scattered trees of the Yankee border.

"Oh, the good old Red Lane is open for me here all right," said Roi, boasting carelessly. "They're looking for me twenty miles north of here. The good old Red Lane is easily shifted overnight." He laughed loudly and looked at the window in the far end of Beaulieu's house.

"But when you shift three thousand sheep and drive 'em across in daylight you shall find much trouble some of

these days," warned Vetal. "That Red Lane ain't made to be use after sun-up."

Roi did not reply. His eyes were fixed on the curtained window, but the curtain continued to guard it jealously.

A man, dust-streaked and panting, came running up on the outside of the drove, leaping over the gutter boulders.

"What say, boss? All right ahead?"

"Let 'em go, Nappy! Divide 'em as I told you. Same pastures as on the last trip. When you come across Jeffreys tell him I'll meet him later in the day. I'm going to hang up here awhile."

He was staring again at the curtained window. He turned from the drover and walked past the window, flicking his riding-whip at the hurrying sheep, in his bravado exhibiting the airs of the commander. He shouted orders.

"It is bad for you and bad for me, and now you go to make it much worse," complained Vetal, at his heels. "She hears—she sees. She has come back to hate us for what we do on the border."

"If she has got whims that a good Acadian girl shouldn't have, then it's time to have an understanding. If she doesn't hate Yankee sneaks the way she ought to hate 'em, we'll find out what the reason is," declared Roi, doggedly. "It looks to me, Vetal, as though you need help in handling your own daughter."

He kicked viciously at bewildered sheep who ventured into the broad yard of Beaulieu's Place. He cursed the dogs who were slow in turning the flanks of the drove.

"If she is ashamed of me because I've made my good money on the Red Lane, as my father and lots of other good men did before me, it's because she has been getting Yankee ideas that an Acadian girl shouldn't have, Vetal.

It's right to cheat a Yankee. It's a part of the game on this border. They have always cheated *us*."

But Vetal Beaulieu did not seem to find consolation in Roi's opinions. He plodded to and fro in the yard, his somber gaze on the sheep.

"My girl has come home, and she is ashame of her poor father," he muttered. "I have work and save for her, and she is ashame. I think it is the very bad time for poor Vetal Beaulieu who have work so hard all his life for his girl."

The laggard file-closers of the weary sheep were scuffling past. Behind them came the men with the long staves, bawling to their charges.

"Bring out half a dozen bottles of the white rum, Vetal," directed Roi.

But the master of Beaulieu's Place gave a furtive glance at the curtained window, growled, and kept on walking.

Roi hurried into the big room and came out with his hands full of bottles.

"Open them later, boys, when the pasture bars are up behind the bleaters," directed the chief. "Keep 'em moving. There's no customs sneak ahead of us on the Red Lane this morning."

The drovers grinned, divided the bottles among themselves, and hurried on.

Suddenly Vetal, who had peered under his palm each time he turned to the west, threw up his arms and gave a shrill cry.

"What have I tell you—what have I tell you, Dave Roi? You have took the chance. You have fooled with the daytime. You have gone against the bad thing this time."

There was no mistaking the identity of the person who appeared suddenly on the brow of a hillock just ahead of

the drove. The first shaft of the rising sun touched the insignia on the man's cap. A spot of reflected light sparkled ominously in the eyes of the smugglers. This man was clearly an officer of the United States customs. He was alone. Roi leaped upon the granite base which supported the boundary's iron post. No other officers were visible.

"The d—d sneak," he blustered. "There's only one of him. He's tumbling into this thing by accident."

He leaped down, tugging at his hip pocket, and ran toward his men, who had halted in the highway. He thrust his revolver into the hands of one of the drovers.

"Duck around through the edge of the woods and give him a lead hint to move. Get behind him. You can do it easy."

The man pushed the weapon away.

"I'm hired to drive sheep, not to shoot officers, Mr. Roi."

"You don't propose to let one man hold us up with three thousand here on the hoof, do you? What kind of cowards are you?"

He shook his revolver above his head and turned from one to the other.

"Where's your nerve, boys? Get after him."

"What's the matter with your doing that kind of a job yourself, Mr. Roi?" inquired the big fellow who had thrust back the weapon. "I'm no coward, but murdering a custom-house man isn't in my line. I don't own these sheep."

"Well, I do! And I don't propose to have a lone-handed sneak steal 'em. And who said anything about murder? Gad, they don't make the right kind of men these days. Give you fellows wool and a bleat, and you'd fit into this drove here." He stamped about, cursing them. "It's your fault! You ought to have been here before

daylight, you loafers. And now that you're here you're no good."

He whirled and shook the revolver under the nose of a stocky youth.

"If old Blaze Condon was here—if your father was alive, he wouldn't be standing here shivering on one foot. He'd know how to open the Red Lane if only one man was blocking it—yes, if a dozen Yankee hounds were over there!"

The youth knocked the neck of his bottle against his staff, broke the glass, and drank from the ragged opening.

"Make it worth while, Mr. Roi?" he suggested, insolently.

"A hundred if you drive him!"

"Good pay for driving sheep, but a devilish small price for driving a customs man."

Roi looked down the line of his woolly property. The man on the hillock stood like a statue, waiting. The leaders of the flock had passed him. The sheep could not be turned and herded back across the line. The officer was posted in a way to prevent that.

"Five hundred to you, Condon, if you do something so that we can get those sheep out of this scrape—and I don't care what you do."

"That sounds different!" The youth turned up the broken bottle and drank again. The liquor ran down over his breast, for he could not set his lips on the jagged glass. He threw the bottle at the iron post and reached for the revolver.

"Go on with your drove, boys," he said. "I'll cut around behind."

Roi strode into the big room on the heels of Beaulieu. There was fright on the publican's seamed face. He trudged about his truck, muttering his fears, looking from

the corners of his eyes at Roi, who came to the truck and poured liquor for himself.

"Dirty work, eh?" he sneered, catching some of Vetal's words. "Well, you didn't think I was going to do it myself, did you, when there's a drunken fool handy?"

"Your father would not have hire a man for murder."

"My father operated on this border when officers would handle a piece of money or stay out of the way where they belonged. If Yankee sneaks are bound to get in the way in these days they've got to take the consequences."

"Your father was not so reckless like you. He would not have come across here in the broad day," stuttered Vetal.

As he hurried to and fro in the room he kept cocking his head, listening, fear in his eyes. In a few moments that fear became the ugliness of a man whose nerves are overstrained. He turned on Roi, who was lurking within doors.

"You hire a man to go off to murder, and you hide your head. Name o' God, Dave, I think you been the coward."

"I'll run my business without taking any advice from you, Beaulieu." He poured another drink for himself. His hand was shaking. He was pale. "There isn't any murder in this. I didn't tell Condon to murder any one. What he does he does on his own responsibility."

"Ba gar, you are the coward," insisted Vetal, angrily. "You lie to yourself because you are the coward."

The agony of that waiting in the silence was too much for his Gallic nerves. He stormed at Roi. Anger relieved his stress of emotion somewhat. His own fury met ready response from the smuggler. Roi retorted savagely; and the two cursed each other, hiding their deeper emotion under incoherent speech and nasty oaths.

"You have sent a drunken man to go and do something," shrilled Vetal. "And a drunken man he has no brain, no

care of what he do. You go and make my place the headquarter for this thing. You make me either the liar or the man who get mix in, and he cannot help himself. You do that, and my Evangeline here to see, to hear it all!"

"According to what you've been telling me your case can't be much worse with her than it is now," said Roi, with a brutal sneer. "It's a case of stand together, Vetal. You can't afford to throw me down. And if Evangeline is going to run your business and mine, too, it's about time to find out about it."

Then they heard that which both had been listening for with cowardly dread. There was the sudden popping of shots; men outside yelped at each other like angry dogs.

"Look and see who gets the best of that," gasped Beaulieu.

But the smuggler turned his back on the door, shook his head, and poured another drink for himself.

"What you don't see you won't know about," he muttered.

The two in the big room stood and looked at each other. Silence had fallen without. They mutely confessed by the glances they exchanged that neither dared to step into the sunshine and confirm what they feared. Thrushes lilted in the edge of the forest, and they heard the plaintive whummle of cattle in Beaulieu's barn, coaxing for the open. Then there came the hurrying footsteps of a man on the hard clay of the highway.

Beaulieu leaped to the door, slammed it shut, and dropped the bar across it. A moment later some one kicked upon the planks.

"Open this door! Quick! Open this door. I'm hurt. I need help."

It was not the voice of one of Roi's men. The two inside stared at each other and did not stir.

"I'm bleeding. I need help. Quick!" appealed the voice without.

But they did not open the door. On their tiptoes they slunk back against the wall, so that they might not be seen through the windows. There was the silence of the June morning for a little while.

"Ho, inside, there! Haven't you got common decency?"

The door shook under blows dealt by a boot-heel.

"I command you to open. In the name of the United States, open this door."

Suddenly Beaulieu saw his daughter. She had come into the big room noiselessly from the inner recesses of the house. Over her night-gear was a wrapper of bright colors. Such a robe might have seemed gaudy on another. But the garment appeared to belong to her brilliancy. Against the soft duskiness of her Acadian pallor her cheeks glowed with vivid hues. In the liquid depths of her big black eyes strange fires sparkled. There was appeal there, too. But resolve dominated her excitement. Both of the men who sneaked back in the shadows by the wall felt the influence of that resolve and blinked uneasily when she stared at them. The father felt it most. He had tried to explain to Dave Roi that morning. But his halting tongue had not found words to describe an emotion which had been new to him. This grave, beautiful girl had faced him with her reproaches the evening before. She was centered in a mental and spiritual poise that had left him abashed and grieved—yet angered in a sullen, secret way. She came straight to her father, pushing back the tumbling masses of her dark hair.

"Why do you not open that door, father?"

"Are you going to let a man die here on your doorstep? —you thief of a Canuck!" demanded the man outside. His voice broke in pain and passion.

The girl gathered the folds of her bright robe close to her neck and hurried to the door.

Vetal ran from the wall. He screamed at her. He spoke in the patois of their race.

"Do not open that door."

The man without was beating at the planks still.

"You are my girl. I command you. You are to obey."

With her hands on the bar, she turned on him. For a tense instant she looked at him.

"No, the Good Mother commands—and this is the door of an Acadian home."

She threw the bar out of the slot.

"Stop her," yelped Roi. "God, man, can't you handle your own daughter?"

No, Beaulieu could not. This rebellion of his womankind cowed him. The traditions of Acadia had been overthrown. Here was a girl back from St. Basil with something new, compelling, dominating in her soul. He stood before her, his jaw dropping, his hairy fists closing and unclosing—and she swung the door wide.

A young man stood there. His cap bore the eagle of the United States customs service. His bronzed face was gray under the tan; the sweat of agony dripped from his forehead. His sleeve was stripped up over a brawny forearm; a handkerchief was knotted around the elbow. Blood was dripping from his finger-tips.

"I am hurt!" he gasped. "I am—" Then he stopped.

Even Beaulieu, in the tumult of his own emotions, could see that utter, paralyzing astonishment had overwhelmed this visitor. He who had been pale flushed. He stepped back. He stammered broken words of apology.

Her cheeks were flaming. Her voice trembled when she spoke to him, but the dauntlessness of this girl who had just conquered her own father supported her spirit,

"Come in. Acadians do not turn folks in trouble away from the door."

He came in, bending his head under the lintel, for he was tall above the average of men.

Beaulieu backed away from the door, snapping his eyes from one to the other with squirrel-like jerks of his head. He saw, but he did not understand. His keen gaze detected what he could not fathom.

Roi's clutch closed about Vetal's arm.

"That's the fellow—that's the dog, Beaulieu. It's that Aldrich! He has been her beau! Look at the two of 'em!"

The man and the girl in the middle of the room did not turn from each other; did not hear the hoarse whisper.

"I hadn't believed all I've heard," hissed Roi. "But they're giving it away by their actions. There's only one reason why a girl looks at a fellow that way."

He choked, angry jealousy in his lowering eyes. Beaulieu flamed with sudden passion at this prompting.

"You come away," he raged, advancing on the couple. "Back into your room, you girl!"

She lifted her head, her eyes still held by those of the young officer. The hues on her cheeks had deepened.

"This is my home, sir," she told him, bravely.

"I didn't know—I didn't dream," he stammered.

"This is my father. My name is Evangeline Beaulieu." Her voice trembled, but her head was raised proudly.

"Father, you must help this man. He is hurt."

"You have come in my place, and I have not ask you," screamed Beaulieu. He stood on his tiptoes and shook his fist.

"I have asked him. I am mistress of this house so long as I remain in it. Will you bind up his wound, father?"

"No; I do nothing for a Yankee hound," he shouted, adding a wicked oath.

"I ask your pardon, sir." Her lips were white and quivering. "Sit there and I will do what poor service I can."

She pointed to a long bench at one side of the room. He staggered to it. Weakness was overcoming him. She ran to help him, when she noted his plight. He fell upon the bench and leaned his head against the wall.

"I am sorry," he murmured. "I would go away if I could. But I am suffering."

She hurried to another part of the room where water trickled from a tap into a barrel. She dipped a basin in the water and came to the officer with a towel snatched from a hook.

Vetal was striding to and fro beside his truck. He raised his hands as she passed him, threatening her; but she did not hesitate. She did not even glance at him. Her obliviousness, her disregard of his presence and profane commands intimidated him more effectually than retort. More than ever he realized that he was in the presence of a species of woman he could not understand; and he feared her.

"You're a coward," said Roi, coming to the truck. "The girl is bossing you, and the Yankee sneak is laughing at you."

"I am not the coward who hire another man to shoot," raged Beaulieu, welcoming an adversary and forgetting prudence.

Roi, startled, caught the flash from the officer's eyes and went back to the wall.

"Mother Mary guide my hands," breathed the girl.

She kneeled before the wounded man, and with gentle fingers began her offices. He set his teeth and leaned his head against the wall. There was silence in the room. Beaulieu stood over against his truck, glowering on the girl

and her work, but he no longer threatened. Roi stepped across the painted line and stood under the picture of the King.

"It will do now. I have troubled you long enough," said the young man at last. "I am grateful more than I can tell you."

"But I could do so little," said the girl, wistfully. "It is bad, I am afraid!"

"I will hurry to a surgeon. You have mended my hurt so tenderly that I'll have strength to get there."

She looked up to meet a smile.

"You have make love to my girl, eh?" blustered Vetal, starting toward them. "I have hear about you. And you sit there and make love to her some more, eh? You make love when I look on, eh?"

Evangeline cried out, shame and grief in her flushed face.

The officer rose from the bench. His face hardened with sudden passion.

"I do not care to hear a father insult his daughter, sir. I have not made love to her. I didn't know her name, sir, until a few moments ago. She does not know my name." He turned to her. "I am Norman Aldrich. And I hope I shall live long enough, Mademoiselle Beaulieu, to prove my gratitude for what you have done to-day."

"You lie to me," insisted Vetal, wrathful suspicion in his snapping eyes. "You have seen my girl before. I have been told you have seen her at St. Basil."

"I have seen her there, sir." He straightened, towering above the frantic little French Canadian.

"You own up to me you have seen her! Then I think—"

Aldrich's right arm was in the sling which the girl had

improvised hastily. He dropped his left hand heavily on Beaulieu's shoulder. He leaned down with an air of sudden menace and checked the little man's threatened explosion with a sharp command.

"Let me say in the presence of your daughter that I never have spoken to her until this day, nor has she ever spoken to me till now." He thrust Beaulieu back and turned to the girl.

"It is shameful that I have to say this before you. I do it to save you from further insult, Mademoiselle. If I find the one who has lied to your father I'll see that this thing is made right."

It was a piteous look of shame she gave him from her tear-filled eyes. He thrilled under that glance. The attack on him, his sufferings, his amazement at finding there at Beaulieu's notorious resort this maiden of St. Basil had benumbed his sensibilities as a blow might momentarily paralyze an arm. He was awaking to what this meeting meant.

He realized suddenly that this girl whom he had seen with her companions on the streets of the convent village had been in his thoughts from the first meeting. A flash from her dark eyes when she had passed him, a jump of his heart when he had met her gaze, such had been the sum of their meager love-making; and on her part it was not love-making, it was spiritual knowledge that she had seen one who swayed her and drew her thoughts outside the narrow environment of convent walls.

The shock of meeting her here—the knowledge that she was Beaulieu's daughter—all that was of small account in that tense moment when she looked up at him with tears in her eyes. The beauty of Evangeline Beaulieu had dwelt in his soul ever since he had seen her at St. Basil. But admiration is not love. Suddenly he saw this girl of

the border in new light. She had shown him woman's tenderness—defying her father to minister to him in his agony. She had been brave for his sake in a moment of trial. Now she gazed at him, shrinking, sorrowing, ashamed. His heart went out to her. Love does not reason. Love does not count and calculate. He choked. He felt an overmastering impulse to take her to himself, to put his arm about her, to protect her, dry her tears, and comfort her distress. In the tumult of those emotions he was conscious that Beaulieu was shouting, but the purport of the frenzied man's words did not reach him till the girl began to cower like a victim under the lash.

"You know it, Dave Roi! You have told me. Now tell it to him. Tell it to her. You say they have make love past that convent wall. You have heard it all. Now you shall stand up and tell it to him. He say I have insult my girl. You tell him I have good reason to talk to her."

"I know you for a smuggler and a border renegade, Roi," cried the officer, striding to the painted line. "A few minutes ago I heard something about your hiring a man to shoot me. I believe that much about you. But what is this I hear? Are you the cur who has made up this lie about a girl you are not fit to look at?"

Roi scowled at his accuser. He did not advance from his post under the picture.

"You ain't afraid of a Yankee sneak of a customs man, eh, Dave? You tell him what you have told me," adjured Vetal. "I don't propose to have my girl think I talk to her and make up the lie by myself."

"You have been courting her," declared Roi, sullenly.

"God, for two arms just now!" gasped Aldrich.

"If you had four arms," said Roi, swaggering forward a few steps, "I'd still serve notice on you that you can't

steal away a girl who has been promised to me for my wife."

"Yes, she has been promised for his wife," screamed Vetal. "She's my girl. She's going to marry him." His anger overmastered his fear of her. He seized the girl and pulled her across the painted line with him. "You stay on your own side, you Yankee sneak." The epithet which he had employed so many times served him in lieu of further threats; he kept repeating the words, clinging to the struggling girl.

Aldrich made two steps forward. Prudence was not with him at that moment. Wild desire to protect her, to wrest her from them, took possession of him. He forgot his wound and his weakness. But the smuggler was quick to remind him of something which halted him at the strip of paint.

Roi leaped to the truck and seized one of the heavy jugs. He shook it above his head.

"There's the line of your country right under your feet. By the gods, you come across here and try to arrest me on my own side and I'll brain you." Roi had mistaken the officer's sudden advance.

Those words checked Aldrich more effectually than any other threat could have done. He was reminded of his duty and of his limitations in that duty.

His emotions had been played upon cruelly that day: he had been near death; he had been succored by a beautiful girl who had appeared to him in woman's dearest rôle, her soft fingers caressing his wounded flesh, her dark eyes upraised to him in tender pity while she ministered. His first impulse in that tense moment when she had been dragged away from him had been to rush to her, to defy both the parent and the man to whom she had been promised. For he knew he loved her. That love had sprung

suddenly from his emotions like a strange flower bursting into magical bloom.

She stood there on the other side of that painted line on a bar-room floor. Wounded—almost helpless as he was—he felt the courage to go to her. It seemed to him that there was appeal in her eyes. But Roi's hot words had reminded him that, though he might cross that line to the girl, he might not cross it as an officer in quest of a smuggler.

The border code is not to be broken lightly. The governments of great countries guard the acts of uniformed officers jealously. While he hesitated, men came in through the big door. They were early wayfarers seeking the wares of Beaulieu's Place. They grinned, understanding only one phase of the scene. Vetal and his loaded truck and Smuggler Dave Roi were safe in sanctuary, holding at bay one of the hated customs spies of the border. They were witnesses whom even a crazed lover could not disregard.

Aldrich exchanged a despairing look with the grief-stricken girl and turned away with a groan. The full folly of his insane resolution was revealed to him as the mists of passion cleared from his brain: Evangeline Beaulieu was with her father, and what right had Norman Aldrich to interfere between father and daughter?

"That's right, you Yankee sneak, pass on about your business," blustered Roi, brandishing the jug. "You've got your hint to keep out of my business."

Aldrich was at the door. He whirled on his heel.

"I'll have my settlement with you later, Roi," he cried, hotly.

"My business is a bad business for you to mix into."

"It's a business where you're too much of a coward to

cross the line and attend to it yourself. You hire men to do your dirty work."

Framed in the sunshine at the door, he took off his cap. He paid no more heed to the oaths and insults of the smuggler.

"Good morning, Mam'selle Beaulieu," he said, with deep feeling. "I shall never forget your hospitality and your kindness."

Jeering laughter of men followed him when he went out into the morning. But he did not mind. He carried with him the memory of that last look from her eyes.

The sheep were gone. He saw no sign of them to the west along the broad road. He knew the habits of smugglers. He understood that the great flock had been hurried on into the States. The sheep would be divided promptly in pastures here and there and their identity as smuggled property lost as soon as pasture bars were up behind them and they had mingled with the flocks of the smuggler's agents.

"It was no sort of a game for a lone hand," he muttered, as he plodded down the road, hugging his aching arm to his breast. "I reckon I'd better be getting to a doctor. I'm going to need two good arms right away."

The birds serenaded him, their songs ringing in the forest aisles to right and left; the fresh morning tried to comfort him. But his teeth were set hard and his face was grim.

At the turn of the road he paused and looked back. No person was visible outside of Beaulieu's Place. But in the morning silence he heard loud laughter still.

"Oh, my God!" he mourned. "To have to come away and leave her there! And yet—"

He drove his hale arm into the air with a gesture of passionate despair and hurried on along the Monarda turnpike.

IV

THE SPIRIT OF OLD ACADIA

THE new arrivals at Beaulieu's Place considered they had good excuse for hilarity. They had seen a customs deputy routed—maimed and helpless. Empty carts crowded the yard, and the drivers were within, herded around the truck. They boasted of what the wains had borne across the line the night before. The Red Lane—smugglers' nickname for whatever route served for their contraband—had been open for glorious traffic.

Roi boasted loudest of all. He was flushed with liquor and with victory. Three thousand sheep had been run across under the very nose of an officer, he told his listeners. He thrust crumpled money into the hands of Vetal and insisted on paying the score for all. He told them what his profits were on that night's work and what his loss would have been had luck gone against him. He bragged of young Condon's prowess and vaunted his own liberality in paying when a man of his gang could deliver the goods.

But Vetal Beaulieu did not laugh with the rest. He poured liquors, growled curt replies to sallies from his guests, and cast anxious glances at the door through which Evangeline had fled. His eyes were red; he staggered with weariness, exhausted with spent passion. But there were those there who wanted to spend money, and he

poured liquors and stuffed the coins and bills in his deep pockets.

The drivers of the wains went away at last. They climbed to the high seats and cracked their whips, bawling to each other. The broad wheels rumbled on the hard road. One man sang the burden of the old Canadian lilt:

> En roulant ma boule le roulant,
> En roulant ma boule.
> Derrière chez nous y a-t-un-e-tang
> En roulant ma boule.
> Trois beaux canards s'en vont baignant.

Then from all along the line of carts roared the chorus:

> Rouli, roulant, ma boule roulant,
> En roulant ma boule roulant,
> En roulant ma boule.

Roi sat on one of the hard chairs, his legs astride the back. He listened to the rude song as it died in the distance and watched Beaulieu rinsing the glasses.

"One of our busy mornings, eh, Vetal?"

The publican tossed his shaggy head with an angry jerk.

"Hardly the sort of a happy home a convent girl would take to?"

Beaulieu shot a blazing glance over his shoulder and did not reply.

"Evangeline has come spying—probably was put up to it by some Yankee sneak," pursued Roi. "But you can't afford to let a girl run your business for you, Vetal. She's coming to herself all right. I was glad to see you pull her into line at last. She needed it. It's hell in a house when a woman is boss. You never knew it to be different."

"My wife was not the boss in my house. She did not

try to be any boss," cried the father. "And I do not like this new time if it make a girl come home and talk hard to the poor old father who have work so hard for her."

"No sense in any of it," agreed Roi. "And it's too bad to have a girl like that spoiled, Vetal. Now, I'm going to talk straight to you. We struck hands on this match a good many years ago. My father agreed with you about it in the good old Acadian way." His potations had made him garrulous. "I really have never been very keen about your girl, Vetal. I might as well tell it as it is. It was probably all right in old Normandy to pick out a girl for a fellow about the time the two of 'em were born. Usually it doesn't work very well in these days. I've seen Evangeline a few times up at the convent—and, honestly, a girl doesn't show up very well in those black dresses. I've seen a lot of girls along the border that I've taken to a sight better. But I tell you, Vetal, it's all off with the other girls from now on. I'll cut loose from 'em."

He kicked the chair away from him and strode about the room.

"I didn't know she was so handsome till I saw her this morning. My God, Vetal, she is a raving beauty!" he said, thickly. "Those cheeks, those eyes, and her red lips! I never saw a girl with that look in her face. Hell fire has been inside me ever since I saw it. It wasn't for me—that look wasn't. Her eyes were on that fellow she was pawing over."

"Then you better court her yourself," affirmed Vetal, sourly. "You say you run here and there with other girls and don't know how handsome my girl is. And you stand here to-day and have been the coward—and a girl don't like that."

Roi's face was livid with rage and jealousy.

"I was taken by surprise. I was in wrong all through

it. I would have done different if I had known. Curse me for a fool! I never saw the real Evangeline Beaulieu till half an hour ago!"

"If you have wake up I'm glad."

"I'm wide awake enough so that no one will ever get that girl away from me. I'll fight the whole border first. You say yourself, Vetal, this is no place for her here in this joint! She has finished at the convent school. You can't send her back to St. Basil. You told me this morning you wanted her to marry me."

"And then you go to work and smuggle sheep under her window and make it hard for me, who have told her you don't smuggle."

"But I didn't know what kind of a girl was hid behind that curtain. Damn smuggling! I'll give it up rather than lose a girl like that. I've got money enough. Here's my talk, Vetal! I want her. I want her now. I'll show 'em something in the way of a handsome wife along this border when I buy new dresses for her. Get the priest to cry the banns." He beat the flat of his hand excitedly upon Beaulieu's shoulder.

"I'd like to have my girl settled," Vetal owned up. The little spirit he had shown once that morning was gone now. He tugged at his gray hair. He kicked aimlessly at cigar butts on the littered floor. "But she say she don't want to marry you," he burst out.

"A whim, man. She's promised to me. I've got fifty thousand dollars tucked away. I'll talk to her. I know how to talk to a girl. And now is the time to talk." He poured liquor into two glasses. He thrust one glass into Beaulieu's hand. "Here's sealing the old bargain, Vetal. Here's to the handsomest girl on the border, and here's to a wedding!"

He was in the mood to hasten matters. He was eager

for another sight of her. He went and beat upon the inner door.

"Evangeline," he called. "My little sweetheart Evangeline! Your father wants you. I want you. There are things to talk about. Come out!"

She came after a time, for he was loud and insistent. She was garbed in black—the dress of the convent school. The broad, stiff collar, turned low on her shoulders, was not much whiter than her face.

"You should have kept the bright dress on, little sweetheart," said Roi, walking toward her, leering at her in his new passion, his burning eyes caressing her fresh, young contours. "In that bright dress you are the handsomest girl I ever saw."

She avoided him and went to her father.

"There's no need of being touchy, little one," mumbled Roi, at her heels. Drink made him carelessly bold. "There's an understanding already. We'll soon have a better one. If any one has told you I am bad, they have lied. I have been waiting for you. Ever since you were a little girl I have waited for you."

She turned on him, for his breath was fanning her neck. She had that in her eyes and mien which had quelled her father the night before. Those big, unwavering eyes, grave and placid now, calm with the spiritual poise and candor of maidenhood, were not the eyes of the border maids with whom he had fooled and philandered. There was something he had not seen in girls' eyes before. He stammered and stepped back.

"Father, I know what you have planned in regard to me with David Roi," she said. "But we shall not be married as you have planned."

"I have promised, my girl!" wailed Beaulieu, fearing her gaze of reproach, and trying supplication,

"But *I* have not promised."

"It was done by the old Acadian custom—by the custom of the Beaulieus when they live in old Normandy," he pleaded. "And the children are expect to help the fathers keep the pledged word."

"But not a word that delivers them into shame and bondage," she declared, firmly.

"Do they teach you that at your school, or did you learn it from some Yankee sneak?" blazed Roi, stung by this reference to himself. "You can't fool me! There are plenty of folks along this border who are trying to make good Acadians over into low-lived Yankees."

"I have been taught to obey my father in all good and true things," she said. "In other things my immortal soul shall tell me what is right. Father, I have not promised to marry this man. Do not tell me to marry him, for I want to obey you in what is good and right."

It was utter and settled rebellion, and Beaulieu understood that no appeal could change the determination of that girl who stared at him from her black eyes with such direct gaze that his own eyes fell.

"Let me talk," blurted Roi, angrily.

"I heard you talk outside my window. I heard you breaking the laws and glory in it."

"Oh, I say, it has always been done on the border. My grandfather, your grandfather, my father, your father, have not been thought any less of because they have shown that they are not afraid of the stingy Yankees."

She stared at him with such cold disdain, such provoking contempt, that he lost control of himself. He remembered the look she had given another in that room a little while before. He caught her savagely by the hands and held her. He put his face close to hers.

"Don't you suppose I know? Don't you suppose I

know? A nice excuse you are giving me! A girl who has lived all her life on the kind of money that Vetal Beaulieu makes!"

She struggled, but he would not let her go. Vetal moved as though to assist her.

"I have been ashamed of my father's money since I have found out!" she cried.

Vetal stepped back, his face hardening.

"Tell that to a fool—not to me," stormed Roi. "It's that Yankee—that's what ails you. You got your eyes on him when he was sneaking and spying around St. Basil. You've been thinking of him while I've been waiting for you—waiting for you to come and keep the promise that our families struck hands on. I've waited like an honest man. I could have had the best between the Temiscouata and the St. Croix. And you're loving some one else. I tell you I can talk to you, even if your father doesn't know how to do it."

He should have taken warning from her face. It was not the face of one who would deign to appeal or deny. She was now another being. She had come from her door pale, grave, wistfully grieving. Now she was suddenly on fire—lithe, tense, cheeks flaming, eyes blazing. She bent and twisted her arms from his rude clutch with a movement so sudden that she freed herself before his fingers could take fresh hold on her. She struck him once across the face with all her strength. She did not retreat. She stood before him so fearlessly furious, so desperate in her rage, that he quailed.

The coward in him recognized something that thrust him back. He might have fought mere brute strength; drink had made him dizzy and reckless. But the soul of this slight girl mastered him.

The bold spirit of the Acadian pioneers glowed in her.

Even Vetal sullenly admired her fiery courage, though rancor, because of her contemptuous obstinacy, swelled within his breast and revealed itself through his mutterings. There was no misunderstanding the girl's mood at that moment. She proposed to dictate her terms.

"I will never marry this man, father."

"You have make this trouble yourself," insisted Vetal. "If you have act better toward him he would have take you and love you very much and make the nice home for you."

"Make a home for me because I have no home of my own, you mean! Where is my home, father?"

"This where I live," he said, doggedly.

"Have you thought over what I said last night?"

"I sat here all the night and do not sleep because I think of it—and I tell you what I think," he shouted, pricked by the presence of Roi at this scene of rebellion to authority, stung by thoughts of what the gossip of the border country-side would be if his own daughter were to rule his affairs. "I think I keep on and run my business like I have run it when I have work hard to make it easy for you."

"I'll take not another cent of this sort of money." She flung a gesture which embraced the loaded truck. "I begged of you on my knees last night, father. I tried to talk to you as a loving daughter should talk. I want you to be a good man."

"Meaning that priests and customs hounds are the only decent people in the world, I suppose," sneered Roi.

But she kept her face turned resolutely from the man.

"I will be your obedient and true daughter—I will work, father, so that you and I may eat honest bread. But this home—this cheating of the laws—this business

which takes money for poison—I'll not endure. I will not stay here."

"You say, then, like you say last night, that I must break my bottles, throw away my good business, and give my dollars to loafers of priests?"

"I say you must be an honest man."

"You have your chance to marry and have a nice home; you have your chance to be the rich daughter of Vetal Beaulieu. You must take one or the other. I don't let my girl make the fool of me among all the people," he declared.

"No, I have one more chance, father."

He scowled at her.

"I shall go away and earn my own living—and wait until you become what a good Acadian ought to be."

He did not rave at her any more. His passion had exhausted itself. His mood was that of stubborn anger now. That secret fear of her made him reject the idea of holding her against her will.

"I am going away, father."

He tossed his hand at the door. She gazed at him a few moments, but his hard eyes did not soften under their tufted brows. She went away into her room.

"Let her strike out," advised Roi. "She won't get very far or stay very long. And when she has had her lesson she'll come home and be sensible."

Evangeline, in her room, gathered the few belongings she had brought from St. Basil, tied her hat over her dark curls, and came back into the big room where her father and Roi still waited in surly silence.

"Good-by, father," she said, with dignity. "I shall pray to the Good Mother for you."

"You have in your pocket, mebbe, some of that black and dirty money I have made here, working hard for you

in this room," he suggested. "Perhaps you better not take that away from here. It's the very bad money."

She flushed. In her distress that seemed a cruel, a childish revenge. But the shrewd old Acadian had a reason outside of the desire to humiliate her. It had suddenly occurred to him that a penniless girl would not be able to go far in the world. The suggestion of Roi was bearing fruit. After her lesson she would be an Acadian daughter, meek and obedient.

She produced a few coins from a purse and, turning modestly from them, drew a tiny chamois bag from its hiding-place in her breast.

"It's what I have saved from my allowance," she explained, her voice steady. "I changed the money into gold pieces and saved them." She laid them and the silver coins in his outstretched hands.

"It's the wicked money—I suppose your fine, high friends tell you about the wicked money of your poor old father," he sneered.

"I want to remember that I said good-by to you in sorrow, not anger," she replied. "It is right I should not carry away your money if I am going in disobedience, as you think."

She went out of the big door and walked away down the Monarda road and did not turn her head to look back at Beaulieu's Place.

"Give a filly her head if you want to know where her hankerings will take her," said Roi, coming back from the door. He watched the girl out of sight. "She has headed straight into Yankeeland." His face worked with his jealous passion. "Damn it, I'm not so sure that we ought to let her go, Vetal."

"It's not much of a wife she make for you the way she feel now—not much of a daughter she make for me," re-

turned the stubborn master of Beaulieu's Place. "If the woman stand and rule, then the man must lie and roll. That has for long time been the wise say in Acadia. She will come back pretty soon—mebbe this night she will come back, for she's only a girl." Thus out of his ignorance of woman's deep nature did he fatuously comfort his misgivings. "You might go along far behind and watch her," he suggested to Roi.

"I'm taking no chance across that line just yet—awhile—not even to follow Evangeline Beaulieu," snapped the smuggler, promptly. "When the boys drift back this way, tell 'em to meet me over east—I'll feel safer with ten miles between me and the boundary."

He hurried out, mounted his horse, and clattered away.

"If my girl would only think so good of him as he think of himself," said Vetal Beaulieu aloud, listening to the flying hoofs, "it would make a fine marriage. But she don't pat his face like she think much good of Dave Roi."

It was very still. The sun was hot and high. Sleepy drone of insects had replaced the songs of the birds. The stupor of somnolence descended on Vetal.

He stretched himself across his broad door in the sunshine and snored, his head on his breast. He did not want to lose a customer. He knew that no one could enter without waking him.

Faring along the Monarda turnpike, now in the flare of the high sun, now treading the checkerings of shade and light under the wayside trees, trudged the Evangeline of a newer Acadia, self-expatriated.

Vetal Beaulieu would not have slept as soundly if he had understood women better—and the resoluteness of one woman in particular.

V

DOWN THE WORLD WITH BILLEDEAU

NAXAGORAS BILLEDEAU came fiddling through the drowsy noon.

His pudgy little horse slouched along sleepily. The dished wheels of the dusty buckboard wabbled and revolved at about the rate of speed observed by the second hand of a respectable clock.

Anaxagoras Billedeau sat on the buckboard's seat, his short legs crossed, his body doubled forward—and he was fiddling industriously.

The reins were loose on the dashboard. The horse plodded with wagging ears, needing no driver. It was the fond belief of old "Rosum-the-bow"—such was Billedeau's nickname along the border—that his horse so loved the fiddle's strains that the music made roads smooth and hills easy.

So now, when the sun beat upon the white clay stretches, Anaxagoras fiddled for the wagging ears of the patient beast—the shaggy little horse who drew this fiddling rover up and down the broad valley of the St. John.

No one along the border thereabouts who did not know Billedeau! He was very much of a public character in the Acadian country—the wandering minstrel of the plain folks of the sloping valley fields and the hedging forest's clearings.

There is a song of many stanzas extant along the border

and it celebrates the fame of Fiddler Billedeau. The first verse goes:

If you've been on Madawaska, I guess perhaps you know
Old Rosum-the-bow—that's Billedeau.
He's a short, fat, wide man—way out—so!
Oh yes, that's him—that's Billedeau.
He fiddles for his living, and he plays so very nice,
He plays so long's you like him for a very little price—
For a supper and a bottle of that white morson—
He plays for kitchen dances on the North St. John.
Ho, hi, ho!
Rosum on the bow,
We like a lot of music, oh, M'ser Billedeau!
Ho, hi, ho!
Caper heel and toe—
You shall fiddle for my wedding, good M'ser Billedeau!

This was the Anaxagoras Billedeau who came fiddling through the drowsy noon. His eyes were closed, and haste mattered not to him. For, wherever there was a roof on the border, he knew that shelter waited for him—shelter, food, and a bed, and baiting for his little horse.

The horse stopped, and Billedeau did not open his eyes. There was no hurry.

But the horse had seen a girl who rose from beneath a roadside tree and came so close to the side of the highway that even a sleepy horse could understand that she had business to transact with the fiddler. So the horse halted. And when the girl spoke, Anaxagoras opened his eyes.

He did not know the girl. But as one who had viewed all the border beauties over the bridge of his fiddle for many a year, and therefore possessed judgment in the matter of charms, he realized in his heart that this girl was entitled to reign queen over the fairest of the others.

Her dress was black, her hair was dark, and between glowed a face whose eyes were anxiously, eagerly alight,

ANAXAGORAS BILLEDEAU CAME FIDDLING THROUGH THE DROWSY NOON

whose lips were red and parted, appealingly, whose eyes were twin prayers to which a saint would incline.

"Bo' jour, Mam'selle," cried Anaxagoras, dragging off his rusty hat.

She answered him in the patois of the border—the archaic dialect of old Normandy; its forms of speech have persisted from the times of the forefathers, even as the strains of Jersey cows and Norman horses have persisted in Acadia.

"I am Evangeline Beaulieu, M'ser Billedeau. I have seen you in the north country at St. Basil."

"Ah, I am the very well-known man, Mam'selle." He patted his fiddle and tucked it under the buckboard's seat. "Those who have the jolly feet remember me. You have danced, eh, when my fiddle played the good plon-plon?"

"I have not danced, M'ser, for I have been in the convent school ever since I was a very little girl."

"Then the young men have been very sad all these years," he declared, with a flourish of old-time gallantry. "You are a Beaulieu, eh? A Beaulieu of Ste. Agathe? A Beaulieu of the Coté portage, or—"

"I am Vetal Beaulieu's girl," she confessed, bravely, though her lips quivered. "Vetal Beaulieu of the border store."

He opened round eyes. He clucked softly. He jerked his head with sideways gesture.

"You are the girl of Vetal of the Monarda Pike?"

"Yes, M'ser Billedeau. I must tell you a sorrowful truth, for I have a great favor to ask of you. I am going away from home. I am going to earn my own living. I could not stay with my father. There has been sad trouble between us."

He looked into her brimming eyes and then turned

away to stare over the tops of the distant trees which hedged Monarda clearing.

"I came home last night. I did not know before. We do not hear of many things at the convent school. I thought my father was in honest trade. I cannot stay there."

"But it is very bad for the young girl to leave her father—to go off here and there, where she don't know!" He wrinkled his brow and surveyed her with compassion. "Ah, it is not a good home for a young girl in Monarda clearing. That is right. But it may not be a good place for a young girl if she goes away to some other home. I am an old man, Mam'selle. I have been about much. I have seen. I know."

"I cannot go back there. I have been taught to know what are the wicked ways, M'ser. All my life I have been taught. All the truth is deep in here!" She patted her breast with trembling hand. "My father should have understood that when a girl has been brought up in the good way she will hate wickedness. He will not change from his wicked ways."

"They have taught you the sober minuet, and now he expects you to come and dance the lively jig all at once," remarked the old Canadian fiddler, sagely. "You have been made the very good girl—he made you that by sending you to the convent school. Ah, no! He cannot expect that you will stay in that home if he does not make it better. He has some other home, then?" he asked, shrewdly.

"He says that I must marry the man to whom he has promised me—a man whom I saw breaking the laws this morning!" The flush deepened in her cheeks. The indignation of outraged modesty flamed in her eyes. "That man held me and threatened me and breathed his

liquor fumes in my face and insulted me—and my father did not protect me. So I will not go back to that house!"

"Perhaps I know that bad man?" he suggested, with rising inflection.

"David Roi, who smuggles!" she said.

He darted at her such a sudden, strange look that she started back. His eyes narrowed. He opened his mouth to speak, and then snapped his jaws together. She waited, curiosity sparkling in her eyes. But Anaxagoras Billedeau, after once again threatening with open mouth to speak, decided to hold his peace.

"What do they teach young girls at the convent school of St. Basil?" he asked, changing the subject so suddenly that the girl blinked at him in bewilderment.

"All the things a girl ought to know, M'ser."

"I think that is not so," he cried. "No, it is not so! For if a girl has a husband promised to her and she has not found out that he—"

He checked himself again.

"I will listen and be thankful for what you tell me," she entreated.

"We'll go on to that business you spoke to me about —that favor," he said. "That will be my own business."

"Where are you going, M'ser Billedeau?"

"Ah, here and there, where they may want the fiddle to play." He had recovered his smile and his gallantry. "It makes no difference to my old horse and me, so long as we do not hurry. For a door is always open, whether it's there or here."

She came close to the dusty wheel, nerving herself to make her appeal.

"I do not know any one. I have no money. I shall have to tell you that part first, M'ser. I gave my little

stock of money back to my father. I want to go north to the big school in Père Leclair's parish—to the Yankee school. Do you know it? It is the new school, and I have been told they need teachers there—teachers who can speak the Acadian tongue."

"I have heard about that new school. It is said that the Yankees have built it there so that all the boys and girls of the border may be trained to be Star-spangled Yankees." He grinned shrewdly at her.

"I want to go there, M'ser. Can you take me there? I will pay you out of my first earnings. I will pay well—all you may tell me to pay—for I know no one else to ask for such a great favor."

"It is many miles, Mam'selle. My little horse is old. He cannot travel very fast—and here and there I must stop to fiddle—for they will not let me pass."

"I will not be impatient—I will not trouble you. I do not know how to get there unless I may go with you."

He fingered his nose, pondering.

"Yes, it is a crooked way by the stage-coaches," he admitted—"a long journey and a stop here and there for the night. I think it would be bad for a young girl who did not know. And I have no money to lend you for that journey, Mam'selle. I do not need money for myself, where all the folks of the country-side are so generous and kind to me. They take me in, and they are very glad to see Anaxagoras Billedeau and his fiddle," he said, boasting as a child would boast.

"I fear I have asked for too great a favor," she faltered. "They would not be pleased to see me coming, for I have no money for my food and shelter. I will not urge you further."

She turned away, but he stopped her with a cry.

"It is not that—it is not as you think, Mam'selle. I

have talked too much. It is my fault—I gossip and I talk. Oh, they will be glad to see you come with me—the poor people will be glad to see you come. For the poor people are not like the rich people. The doors are open, and they do not make excuses. So I have been wrong in making excuses to you."

He climbed down from his buckboard's seat. He stood before her, old hat in his hand.

"I forgot politeness in making my excuses, Mam'selle. I have talked too much about my poor wagon, my slow horse, and the long road to the north. I think I must have talked that way because you deserve the very grand chariot of a queen."

He bowed and, though her face was suffused with blushes, she understood the old-fashioned Acadian stock too well to take umbrage at this extravagant compliment.

"To you I offer it all—and to you I offer the hospitality of the homes of my friends—for they would be very angry with me if I did not speak now in their names to a girl who needs the hand-clasp and the kind words. You shall have those words from my friends—the poor people—as we travel on. I will take you to the big school. I shall thank you for your company on the way. Your hand, Mam'selle!"

She extended her trembling little hand, and he helped her to the seat of the buckboard.

"If we go slow you will be patient, eh?" he asked, smiling at her.

She answered him incoherently, for tears were streaming down her cheeks, and she was sobbing.

"We shall not worry any more," he said, soothingly. "If we go slow we shall not worry. No harm will come to us, for all the poor folks are friends of Anaxagoras Billedeau, and you shall find that they will be friends to

you. And we shall come safely to the big school at last."

After a time her tears ceased—they had been tears of gratitude—tears of relief rather than of sorrow. She listened gratefully to the old man's chattering.

Their way took them through a forest where cool vistas of beech and maple stretched away to right and left and where white birches lurked in the green coverts like snowy-garbed dryads peeping timidly.

Farther on, at a wayside spring, he stopped and lifted up to her a draught of sweet water in a bark cup, and when he shared his food with her from his little, round, wooden bucket she ate with the appetite of youth. There was chicken laid between thick slices of cool, moist bread—breast of chicken as white as the bread. There were nut-cakes; there were crinkled cookies with caraway seed sprinkled among flakes of sugar on their tops.

"Ah, I have the good friends here and there who pack my little bucket when I ride away in the morning," he said. "It is good to live in the world with many friends. Perhaps I do very little to earn the good things they give me, but they are poor folks, and they have not many things to be gay about—and the music makes them gay. So I play plenty of music for them, night or day."

"To make folks happy—to make folks forget their troubles, that is worth while, and you deserve the good things they give you," she said. She was thinking bitterly of the traffic of Beaulieu's Place.

"Many think no good at all of a man unless he do something to make much money, Mam'selle."

"I know a man who boasts about how much money he has, but it is money that would burn the hands of an honest man." She was thinking then of David Roi.

"Ah, so I go on through the good country, from St.

Croix to the north, and I hope I do right if I keep the poor people happy," he told her. "Maybe old Billedeau is needed for something."

He leaned back and sang, beating time with his palm upon his dusty knee:

Quand on est si bien ensemble,
  Bon soir, mes amis, bon soir.
Devrait on jamais se laisser,
  Bon soir, mes amis, bon soir,
    Bon—soir!

The old horse plodded with swaying head and flapping ears. Through checkerings and patches of light, under the shade of the big trees, they went on. They seemed to have the woods to themselves that afternoon. Their progress was slow, but mile after mile was notched off behind them by the windings of the road.

The girl, looking behind now and then, felt comforted by the trees which seemed to march into the way by which they had come, closing ranks after her like sentinels who guarded her flight. It was not leaving home—Beaulieu's Place had never been her home.

Every now and then she felt the yearning of a girl who was homeless, and she was frightened. But Vetal Beaulieu in all the years of her girlhood had left her in the hands of others; and love for a parent does not wax and grow great without the food of association and affection on which to feed. When she thought of Vetal Beaulieu's traffic and his determination to persist in it, when she remembered the insolence of Dave Roi and his leering love-making, the tears left her eyes, and she turned her face to the front. And when she gazed that way, though she strove with maidenly modesty to put it from her thoughts, she saw the face of the young officer to whom her hands had ministered that morning.

So fared Evangeline Beaulieu, homeless and penniless, into the north country, her squire an old fiddler as homeless as she—but a smile lighted his face, he lilted gay songs, and the cheer of his companionship soothed her fears.

They came out of the forest at last. There were fields, and a few little houses were dotted along the road.

Children came running to meet them when they were near the first house. They leaped and shouted, did these couriers, pointing behind them toward their elders who stood waiting in the road.

"Come to our house, M'ser Billedeau!" screamed the children. They cried their names. They came crowding around the slow-moving buckboard. "It is to our house you must come with your fiddle. Père, mère—they say so."

"Ah, the good friends," said the old man, smiling on his wistful charge at his side. "You see, Mam'selle, I have told you the truth about my good friends."

Men who were garbed in fuzzy gray, women whose black eyes beamed greeting, met them at the roadside.

The old fiddler pulled his horse to a halt and stood up and shouted his salutations.

"We shall divide! You, Felix Bourdoin, you shall have my old horse for your barn. I will stay with the good Cotés. For there is the fine floor for the dance."

He came down from the buckboard.

"But there," he said, indicating the blushing girl, "is the guest who will make the house bright wherever she may go."

Half a dozen gaily shouted invitations. Grizzled farmers smiled on her and took off their hats. Youths grinned shyly at her. Girls came pressing forward.

"She shall go with Elisiane Beaupré," announced

Billedeau, and they accepted his dictum with good-humor. Their smiles showed that they enjoyed his jovial tyranny. "You shall take her home, Elisiane. She is Evangeline Beaulieu, who is going for to be a teacher in the big school in the north; and she travels with Anaxagoras Billedeau, for he can show her along the way so many fine scholars who will follow her to that good school."

It was introduction, explanation, all in one. It was tactful; it was comprehensive. They took her to themselves. A pretty girl slid her arm about Evangeline's waist and drew her away. There were no questions—no suspicious oglings. Other girls came laughing behind.

"You shall all come with gay ribbons to the dance tonight," the old fiddler called after them. "I shall make the grand music."

There were many children in the Beaupré family. The little cottage was full of laughter. They crowded about the table when the supper was set forth. But, though the laughter was loud and the jests frequent, the lonely girl received the constant courtesy due to the honored guest. The buoyancy of the Acadian nature was in her soul. She revived as a flower revives when kissed by the sun and bathed with dew. The jollity was the sunshine; the simple-hearted hospitality the dew.

The trammels of a convent school did not brood over that board. The woes that beset her could not live in that atmosphere. Sometimes the tears were very close to the smiling eyes—for this was a real home, and she, poor waif, had none then.

In the dusk she went gaily with them to the Coté house. Billedeau, tuning his old fiddle, smiled at her. She tried to tell the youth, who came to her bashfully, when the fiddler nudged him, that she could not dance.

"Ho, every girl can dance," shouted Billedeau. "Every

girl can dance when my fiddle sings to 'em. You are the honored guest of the Beaupré clearing to-night. You shall lead the march with that fine boy—and then you shall learn the figures of the dances, for all the hands will be out to help you."

And all the hands were out!

When the round, June moon rose redly over the spruces in the east and flushed the clearing with ruddy hues, they all left the Coté kitchen and danced on the greensward before the open door.

The old man played, his wrinkled face pressed close to his fiddle, smiling, crying his jokes to them as they danced, singing now and then.

The pallet in the Beaupré attic where the children slept was narrow, and the niche behind the curtain was small. But the stars of the wide heavens twinkled serenely in Evangeline's eyes before she closed them, and her soul drank in that serenity, and she slept; and in her dreams she danced with one who was tall and bronzed and tender and loving, and who bent his crisp curls to her dark hair and whispered something which made her blush there in the night where only the round moon could see.

VI

THE ANCIENT PROBLEM OF THE CROWDED LAND

THE rising sun quivered hotly behind its gridiron of trees, and the day promised warm.

The little horse was put early to the buckboard so that they who were journeying to the north might make the best of their way in the cool of the morning.

The good folks waved their farewells behind—the children ran beside the buckboard as far as the turn of the road.

"Good-by, M'ser Billedeau! Come to make us gay again!" was the cry which followed the old fiddler and his passenger until they were deep in the forest.

It was cool there. The beeches shook drops of dew upon those who passed beneath. The fresh fragrance of the morning woods came to their nostrils—moist waftings from clumps of witch-hobble where the damp soil was odorous, balmy whiffs from fresh verdure, aromatic savors from lowly patches of pennyroyal where cobwebs spread their dew-spangled fabrics—fairy handkerchiefs dropped in revels overnight.

That was Billedeau's suggestion, that last.

"Those little folks—those merry elves—they forget when the fairy fiddles play; they dance very wild and they have lost their lace mouchoirs."

Evangeline smiled at the conceit.

It seemed a long way behind her—that desolate yesterday.

The woods, the fields, the companionship of poor people of simple faith and kindly joys, comforted her more surely, more sweetly, than words of sympathy.

Nature, on her screen of wood and sky, slipped pictures in such deft and quick succession that there was no time for mournful introspection. A deer was silhouetted on a distant slope; rabbits cocked inquiring ears and peered through tangle of brakes. Birds caroled in the mad joy of June.

When at last they came out of the forest into the fields again, she looked up at the snow-puffs of clouds in the lazy sky and inhaled the scents of ripening strawberries in the wayside grasses.

One more turn of the road, and Evangeline gasped when the scene opened. They had come upon the mighty valley of the St. John. They were on the hills. Far below them the azure river mocked the sky. The little waves twinkled where the breeze brushed whorls upon the water. A bateau crept along the farther bank, its oars flashing with silvery light. Cows strolled on pasture swards, sheep trickled in Indian file among the rocks. Sounds of farm and field rose to their ears—restful sounds made faint by distance. The girl forgot the dusty buckboard, the hard seat, the dished wheels rattling against the hillside rocks and ledges. It seemed to her that she was floating over this panorama on a magic carpet.

"I have thought sometimes, Mam'selle," said the old man, speaking softly in the mellow Acadian patois, "that I would like to go after death and fiddle merry music for the fairy dances. But when I see the valley of the good St. John I think I would like another work for all the days of eternity."

He swept his hand with a broad gesture. The imagination of his race lighted his face.

"I would like to have God give me the new mind and put me among the artist angels who keep so very busy and happy copying out new plans for the other worlds the good God is building."

Her heart swelled. This imagery was fantastic, but she understood him. This wrinkled and rusty old man had the soul of a poet, but his poor gifts gave him only one avenue of expression—his fiddle.

"A wise man has written—and I have read it, that the soul is made up by good wishes—that good wishes make the soul what it will be—what it will accomplish in Paradise," she told him. "You are a good man, M'ser Billedeau. I have heard of you many times. And perhaps to good men comes that which they wish for when they wish very much. The wish may be whispered to you as a hint that it will come to you."

The road led them down the hill by winding ways until they were close upon the water by the river-bank. There were houses in plenty now. They were set closely along the main road which followed the river. All were little houses. Rarely was there seen one which boasted of a brick chimney. Sheet-iron funnels served. Most of the houses were unpainted, were weather-stained. About all of them many children played.

The children cried shrill greetings. Women flourished salutes from doorways, smiling.

"We hope you have the time to come and stay with us pretty soon, M'ser Billedeau?" was a frequent hail.

It was plain from their eagerness that only the presence of his passenger prevented them from being more insistent then and there.

"They are the poor people—they have many mouths

to feed," confided the fiddler. "But they are the very jolly people, for they work hard and they save, and so they have the good things to eat and a ribbon or two for the feast days and the Sundays—a tithe for the priest, and a spare crust for the fiddler when he comes."

He pointed to the windows of the little houses where a bit of lace in the fore-rooms fluttered at the pane—pathetic hint of housewifely longing for grace and beauty.

"Ah, that is what I would do if I had the much money as some men have it," said Billedeau. "I would bring each mother new curtains for the front windows; I would bring each little girl a new ribbon for her hair. Phut! There are so many folks with money who think the poor people need only corn-meal and pork."

Now the highway skirted the river closely. Sometimes the road dipped so that the splash of the twinkling waves was very near; then the way mounted to the hillside.

The hills on either side were high and domed. The slopes were set thickly with fences. The farms were hardly more than narrow lanes. These strips ran back a mile—two miles—to the fringe of woods on the polls of the hills.

At the foot of each narrow wedge of a farm, on the highway, was the little cottage of the owner.

"Once they were the big farms—the broad farms," explained Anaxagoras. "They were the big farms when our grandfathers came up here from Grand Pré, Mam'selle. There was plenty of room up here for the poor refugees. But in these days—you see!" he said, sadly.

"Perhaps they have not told you at the convent—but our Acadian folks are not like the other French people in Canada, Mam'selle. They do not want to run away from their homes to the big cities to stifle themselves in the mills where the cotton dust flies instead of the thistle-down and

the sky is only an iron roof. Our Acadian children want to stay on the good St. John, where their fathers and their mothers live so happy. So when the boys grow up and marry, then the good father takes a slice off his farm—and the slice must be made long so that the boy may have his little house on the long pike; the slice must be made narrow, for there are other boys to grow up; there are girls to marry and bring their husbands to the home where their old folks live. Ah, the Acadians get no joy out of life when they are taken away to the big city—when they cannot live on the St. John, where their fathers and mothers have been so happy all the years. But, Mam'selle, the farms of the old habitants have all been sliced up. You may see for yourself, when you look up at the hills. I do not know what must become of the little children who are playing here to-day—who will grow up and want to live here and make good citizens."

She pointed far ahead into the hazy, blue distance where dark forest growth notched the horizon line, where the hills were thatched with woods unbroken.

"They must buy new land and cut down the trees and make farms as the fathers did so many years ago," she said, out of her innocence.

He shook his head, sorrowfully, his elbows on his knees.

"It should be so, Mam'selle. For they are worthy people, and they work hard and they make good folks for a country to have. But I am very sad. I have watched this thing grow bad through all the years. There are some Yankees who are good. They want the Acadians to live on this border and make the border seem good to those who look across from the Province. But there are other Yankees who are not good. They think of the money first. They do not care if the Acadians go away from the border. They have bought up the lands where the big

trees are. They will not sell. I know many good Acadians who go to them with money—plenty of money in their hands—and try to buy the lands for the sons or the daughters. But no, they will not sell. They say, 'Boh! We do not want Canucks near our timber-lands, chopping down trees, setting fires. There is much money in our trees. We want the money. We do not care about the farmer. Go away to some other place!'"

"And so they must go?" asked the girl, wistfully.

"Ah, they do not go away—many of them do not go away," cried the old man. "And I am afraid—I am afraid! I see some very bad things for this border. I see hatred and I see men fighting, and I'm afraid that there will be bitter killing and great sorrow."

She stared at him with frightened eyes.

"Perhaps I should not say such things to you, Mam'selle. But you tell me you hope to teach in the big Yankee school, eh? Then perhaps you will remember some things I tell you, and you can tell them to others who will be willing to help the poor Acadians. There are Yankees who are good. Perhaps they will help if you talk to them."

She looked up at the peaceful hills swelling against the sky, at the patient men who were bowed over their tasks in the sloping fields, at the trailing flocks and the grazing herds.

"I do not understand," she gasped.

"They do not understand—the others do not understand—they who see only the outside of things," he declared, with much bitterness. "The stingy, the money-loving Yankees who have bought all the woods do not understand—and they do not want to understand. They sneer at the 'Canucks,' so they call them. They do not understand what love of home and the river and the soil is—what home means to these poor people who have so

little. 'Go away,' they say to the poor people, who have worked so hard and have saved the little money and beg to buy the land. 'Go away. We can make more money from the trees. We do not want you for citizens. Leave your wife and your children and come to work in our woods if you like—but we don't care about homes and farms.'"

"But, ah, Mam'selle," he cried, with passion, "those poor Acadian peasant people remember when their fathers came up this river, struggling with their rafts, fighting their way past the falls and over the shallows, for to make their home. And they were here before those Yankees ever heard of this valley. The farmers say that they have the right to own land now on which to set their feet and build their little homes. They say the Yankees shall not tell them to go away, after their fathers have discovered this for the homes of Acadians. They ask to be allowed to buy; and when the Yankees say no—then, Mam'selle, I am afraid. For the Acadians are taking —here and there they are taking. And they say 'Our money is ready. We will give our money. We will not give up our homes.'"

She was silent. The landscape had lost its brightness, suddenly, she felt.

"This is not the fine talk for a young girl to listen to," said Billedeau, breaking the silence. "I had forgot myself, Mam'selle. I always forget myself when I talk about the sad thing that has come up along the border. I'll talk no more. You know now how bad it is. Perhaps you can talk sometimes to some one wise and strong among the Yankees. For it is very bad. Our poor people are settled on fifty thousand acres of land, where they have no title that the law makes good. Some have been put off. Others have been threatened. I have heard rumors.

It is said that the Yankees who own—or who have bought titles from those who say they do own—are angry now, and will come to take what they say is theirs. But on some lands Acadians have lived for many years. I do not know how it will all fall out, Mam'selle, but I am frightened by my thoughts. The Yankees are stern and greedy—but the Acadians are dangerous when they are stirred, Mam'selle. You and I can realize it better than the Yankees. I feel the old blood stirring me once in a while, and I am reminded that the patient folks have hot fires that they must keep smothered."

Only once in her placid life till then had unbridled passion overmastered Evangeline. She had not fathomed the depths of her Acadian temperament until her soul had rebelled at the insults of David Roi.

"I understand, M'ser Billedeau," she said, quietly—but she remembered the fury which Roi had evoked, and she was frightened by that memory.

They rode along, busy with their own thoughts for a long time.

It is a well-worn saying in New Acadia that tongues distance the telegraph.

Start a bit of news at St. Francis on the north and it is south at the Mellicite portage as though it were really the winged word.

Therefore, the information that Fiddler Billedeau was on the St. John highway distanced the fiddler in his slow progress.

A man who came galloping bareback on a fuzzy horse emerged from a branch road and stopped Billedeau with joyous shouts.

"Saint Xavier has sent you to us, good Fiddler Billedeau! To-night the son of Supple Jack Hebert is to marry the pretty Joe Rancourt girl. We have tried to get word

to you. But we have not been worried—we knew that the good saint would send you because Marie Rancourt, she have pray very hard. So come along behind me to the Bois-de-Rancourt clearing."

He whirled his horse, flourishing his hand delightedly. There was no doubt in the mien of that messenger. It was understanding, complete; the word to Billedeau—that was all!

The old man turned hesitating gaze on the girl at his side before he lifted the reins.

"It is not midday, Mam'selle, and we have come slow—and the big school is far ahead. They take much for granted on the border, when it is a word to the old fiddler."

"You warned me we should come slowly," she said, with a smile. "And it would make me very sad to think of the wedding without the music."

"Ah, you make the fine companion for the fiddler who plays for the poor people. I shall tell them what you said—and you shall see!"

He turned his old horse into the side road which wound sinuously up the hillside away from the river. When they topped the slope they were again in the forest. The man on horseback summoned them on excitedly with tossing hand. He was bringing the crowning joy of the wedding. He was eager to show his prize, to receive plaudits from a chattering throng and drink his portion of the white rum.

It was a crooked way and a rough road, but Evangeline rode joyously. The spirit of youth was in her, and she had already sipped of the simple cup which exhilarated that Acadian country-side. She journeyed on to the Rancourt wedding with thirst for more of the gaiety of the poor people.

If Vetal Beaulieu could have seen that look on his

daughter's face he would have been less remorseful for his stubborn anger when he turned her forth into the world alone.

Vetal Beaulieu came near to beholding that look. For he passed the mouth of that side road only a little while after Evangeline had gone over the brow of the hill into the forest. He was alone. He was clattering along in a buckboard, his elbows akimbo, his lips pursed with clucks to his horse. He did not look to right or left. He had been told on the St. John road that Fiddler Billedeau was far ahead, and that with him in his buckboard was a pretty girl; with that clue Vetal was pursuing. Shame and his haste prevented him from asking more questions as he passed along the road to the north.

Otherwise, he would have surely learned that there was to be a wedding that night in the Rancourt clearing, and he would have been saved a long chase past that side road which led over the brow of the hill. For where a wedding was he would have understood that there would Anaxagoras Billedeau be also!

Past the narrow farms and the little houses, on toward the north country hurried Vetal.

He had shuttered the windows and barred the big door of Beaulieu's Place, when remorse and sudden panic of fear for his daughter had sent him forth on his quest. But now that his chase was taking him far afield, when turn after turn of the road ahead failed to disclose the fugitive, his covetous thoughts ran backward, though his eyes peered ahead. He knew that many fists had beaten upon the door that day—that much money had gone on in pockets of disappointed wayfarers. He remembered that he had turned away customers when he had stormed and wept all the long night. In all the many years Beaulieu's Place had never turned away customers till then.

"It shall be how I say after this," he muttered irefully. "She shall come home and be Beaulieu's girl. I will take her home. She shall not shame me by running about this border. I shall beat the ears of Fiddler Billedeau and take her home, and she shall marry Dave Roi."

He wondered why he had allowed himself to be dominated by her even for a little while. In his wrath he planned retaliation. There were ways of breaking a woman's spirit—it had been done before by Acadian fathers.

The houses thinned out. The forest was ahead. Vetal's horse slowed his gait to a walk. The afternoon was wearing on, and the publican squinted doubtfully at the big trees.

He had passed his days at the loaded truck, selling drams and bottles; he did not know the country of the border. The long road led to the north—he had followed it. But those woods might enfold him when night fell!

"Ba damn!" snarled Vetal. "That fiddler must have wheels on that old horse and push him along very fast with saplings for reins!"

He was cheered by the sudden appearance of a horseman. Here was one who could give him information. The man came cantering from the forest. But when Vetal noted the cap of a Yankee customs officer his face fell. And when the man was close up and Vetal saw a bandaged arm and recognized the officer as Norman Aldrich, his face became a study as a mask for emotions.

The young officer hurried past with loose rein, flinging only a glance at Vetal, who bent his head and did not look up. That attitude was suspicious in a land where it is the custom to raise the hat to all strangers who may pass. Aldrich checked his horse and looked back.

Vetal, in desperate need of information, had stopped, and was just nerving himself to ask questions.

The two looked at each other, and it was plain that both lacked words to fit the case.

Vetal noted one fact which interested him. Aldrich carried a rifle—an unusual weapon for a customs officer on the border.

"Well, you seem to have something on your mind," said Aldrich, first to recover himself. "Is there anything I can do for you, sir?"

The officer's tone hinted very plainly that Vetal Beaulieu did not occupy a very exalted position in his regard.

"You might let me know," said Vetal, stung by this frank contempt, "how you and some other folks I can tell you about get so far in one day or two day. I would like to get there, too."

"I don't understand," returned Aldrich, stiffly. "When a man has a bad wound he naturally gets where he can have it cared for. I don't lose any time in getting back to where I have business."

Beaulieu's eyes fell under the indignant stare.

"While you have fly about so fast have you seen my girl, Evangeline?" he asked. If he had calculated on immediately shifting the talk from a topic he feared he succeeded admirably.

"Has she gone away from home?" Aldrich gasped.

Vetal shrewdly decided that this astonishment was real.

"Then you don't meet her with Fiddler Billedeau on this road, eh?" He pointed his whip at the woods.

"I have not seen her. Why should she be with Billedeau?" He slapped his horse and hastened to the side of the buckboard. He leaned over the father, who blinked up at him, alarmed by this sudden fire of eager-

ness. "Are you searching for her on this road? Hurry up—why do you think she is with Fiddler Billedeau?"

All of Beaulieu's suspicions were aroused—it was plain to him that Roi's hint had foundation. His sullen grudge was stirred to the depths.

"Has she gone away from your place? Is she with Billedeau? Why is she with the fiddler?" demanded Aldrich, excitedly.

"I think perhaps she go to pick up the pennies the folks throw to him when he fiddles," growled Vetal. He jerked the reins and started his horse. He kept on toward the forest, too angry to care which way he traveled. He cursed, beating his horse along. He growled his convictions aloud. Roi was right—there was something between his girl and this hated Yankee. Here was where she had got her foolish notions about what had always been done by shrewd folks on the border—what always would be done. And if she could not have her own way about the business of her poor old father and the man who wanted to marry her and give her all the good things, then she would run away and hunt up the Yankees? Well, he would see about that thing! He lashed the horse on. When he got his hands on her he would show the gossips that he was boss in his own house, and that his girl could not disgrace him by running around the countryside with fiddlers and customs sneaks.

Aldrich stared after Vetal until the buckboard had rattled out of sight among the trees.

He had ridden many miles from the north down the river road that day.

There was no Fiddler Billedeau in that direction. He was sure of it.

South? He was hastening south. He had swung to his saddle from the surgeon's door, though the man of

needles and gauzes had warned him impatiently. He had ridden with an arm that throbbed and a head that ached, and every now and then dizziness filmed his eyes. But the Monarda turnpike summoned him south. There was business there in his line, he told himself. His rifle nudged his ribs as he cantered. They needed a lesson on the Monarda turnpike. It should be given promptly, or half the effect of it would be lost.

He rode on after Vetal had disappeared.

However, when the officer came to the first of the narrow farms, he began to make inquiries regarding Fiddler Billedeau.

Aldrich was a young man who was fairly candid with himself—a trait which is rarer than one might suppose. He owned up to his own soul that, when he had decided that duty called him south, the picture of a girl was before him—a girl whose cheeks were on fire, whose eyes prayed to him; a girl who had been dragged by her father across a painted line which marked the bounds of Aldrich's duty as an officer, but across which his love had rushed while his feet retreated.

So he rode slowly when he came to the little houses; half-shamefacedly he asked for information about a fiddler—and information merely dribbled—for the folks of the border do not talk freely about friends when the questioner is a man who wears the badged cap of the United States customs service.

But after a long time Aldrich happened to find out that a wedding party was on in the Rancourt clearing.

A customs officer must be able to put two and two together in his business.

VII

AT THE WEDDING OF SUPPLE JACK'S BOY

THEY danced out-of-doors at the wedding of Marie Rancourt and Supple Jack Hebert's boy.

They danced to the music of Billedeau's fiddle, lighted by "flares" of birch-bark torches, until the moon rose, and then the moonlight was enough.

They danced on the ground. The men had beaten flat and smooth with shovels and mauls a broad space between the clearing's stumps, begrudging no effort, pounding the earth until their backs ached and their muscles were tired. The girls had strewed on the hard ground brown needles which the pines had dropped—had gathered them patiently and scattered them plentifully until all the surface of the dancing space was glossy. They tossed upon the ground a sprinkling of the flowers of the deep woods—boxberry blooms, white violets, too, and clover heads. And over the glossy needles and the flowers which fluttered behind the flying feet the folks sped gaily to the music's strains.

The bride was merely a slip of a girl—barely fifteen. But in the Acadian country the homes are crowded with many children, and boys and girls who kiss and pledge their troth marry very soon to make a new home of their own. The bridegroom of this night was not eighteen.

"Only two more young fools," said Supple Jack, who

lolled by the side of the dance-ground and smoked his pipe and looked on.

But his eyes shone, and he kept from dancing, not because he did not approve, but because he had toiled that day since sunup, chinking with moss the log walls of the new house where his boy and his bride were to dwell. He himself had married still younger, and had been a pioneer in the Rancourt clearing along with Marie's father. For the old farm on the river had been sliced until fences gridironed it. There was no room for the last son who married. To-night Hebert's son and Rancourt's daughter began another home; it nicked the edge of the forest; it was on ground which was owned by those who would not sell to settlers.

The fiddler played, and the young folks danced.

They could not be as happy as that in the cities, in the mills which ground out the lives of the boys and girls. So declared the folk of the Acadian country when they heard that the mill-owners wanted more of the French-Canadian people. And if the boys and girls loved the valley of the St. John, treasured the home ties, bound there by love of home and family, by what right was land withheld from them? They were ready to pay; they had garnered the money by toilsome saving. What would come out of it all in the end? the old folks would ask each other when the boys and girls married and must need have land for the little house and a few acres for the field and the pasture.

Threats had come grumbling up from the far south, where the rich men lived in the cities—men who bought vast tracts which they had never seen. The poor folks had heard the threats. Sullen men who wore badges had brought lawyers' papers, had thrust them into unwilling hands, and had gone away. The poor folks had

pored over the documents. It was strange language they could not understand.

They did not trouble about them on such a night as this when the fiddle sang and the fluttering flowers chased nimble feet over the glossy needles of the pines.

Aldrich heard the gay music in the still night when he was far off.

He tied his horse in the edge of the forest and walked slowly toward the place where the young folks were dancing. He came close, for it is not easy to distinguish faces in the moonlight. Hebert and others of the older ones spied the sparkle of light on the officer's badge and cried out sharply. That note of alarm told a piteous story when one understood. It voiced the ever-lurking fear that underlay the thrift and toil of the poor folks who had crept out, acre by acre, upon the forbidden soil. Some day, perhaps, the threats would be made good. What trouble did those strange papers herald? Here was a man who wore the emblem of authority, and one officer was the same as another to people who knew but little of the law.

The fiddle stopped. The dancers halted. Aldrich saw Evangeline among them, the flush of youth on her cheeks, her lips parted, and her wide eyes searching his face.

"Go on, please," he entreated. He had found himself the center of regard. Embarrassment was in his tones.

"I have not been invited. I ask your pardon."

"All are welcome. It is my son's wedding," faltered Supple Jack, his beseeching eyes on the officer's cap. "You have some business here, eh?"

"None at all, sir. I was passing. I heard the music. It seemed very gay here. So I stopped."

He was looking at Evangeline, his soul in his eyes.

"Run and bring the finest chair—the arm-chair," cried Hebert, pushing his son toward the house.

"No, not for me," expostulated Aldrich. "If I am welcome, may I dance?" He stretched his hand to Evangeline, approaching her across the carpet of pine needles. "Will you dance with me?"

The thrill of her soft palm against his made him forget all those who stood about.

She touched his bandaged arm.

"The doctor said it was not bad, Mam'selle. He scolded me about riding to-day, but I felt that I must hurry back to Monarda clearing."

She trembled under his gaze, for the eyes told her more than his words. She seemed unable to frame reply.

"It will soon be strong," he said. "What you did will make it well very soon."

The fiddle was playing, and they danced with the young folks, for neither had words for the other just then. But when hand met hand words were not needed.

After a time the plain little feast was spread in the new house and the people crowded its tiny rooms. He stopped her at the door.

"They will not notice us just now," he whispered. "But I must know what has happened—why you are here."

She told him, the moonlight on her grave face. There were no complaints, no repining, no resentment.

"So I shall go to the big school and work if Father Leclair will help me," she concluded. "He told us at the convent they needed teachers."

"He is a good friend of mine, Father Leclair," he said to her. "I know he will help you. I will ride north and speak with him. I will send a fine carriage for you. It is too bad—that old cart." He pointed at Fiddler

Billedeau's buckboard, whose infirmities were revealed by the moon.

She smiled and shook her head in gentle protest.

"But he stops here and he stops there—whenever a man lifts his finger or a girl begs for music, Mam'selle. You will be long getting to Attegat parish."

"But I am learning many things they did not teach me at the convent school. I have learned much in the past few days—and since I have been with Fiddler Billedeau I have learned things which have comforted me. There are good folks in the world, after all."

He understood. Her lips quivered. The pathos of this little tragedy of the border would have touched him deeply even had he not loved her. Pity mellowed the passion which swept him toward her. Love when all prospers is airy, is light and buoyant. Love does not sound its full depths until it is weighted with compassion, with the longing to shield and protect.

"Father Leclair is wise and good," she said, brokenly. "I am only a girl, and I do not understand, perhaps. If he tells me it is my duty to go back to my father I will go."

"Father Leclair will not tell you that—he understands the sort of a place Vetal Beaulieu runs. Forgive me, Mam'selle! I forget he is your father. I forgot it the other day. I am sorry for what I said. But I must tell you that your father owes it to you to make a different home if you are to stay with him. It is no place for a girl, there in Monarda clearing."

They had not minded the clatter of a wagon's wheels. Guests suit time to inclination at a border wedding. Gazing at each other, they allowed the belated arrival, whoever it might be, to come upon them before they turned.

But this was no jovial wedding guest.

It was Vetal Beaulieu, furious at sight of them, clucking oaths, shaking his whip over his head, gabbling coarse insults.

"This is how I find my girl, eh? You run away from my home to meet the sneak dog of the customs, eh? You abuse and shame your old father only for an excuse—so that you may run away and be a femme mauvaise off on the sly!"

Beaulieu was shouting at the top of his voice. The wedding celebrators came trooping out. They chattered in amazement. This was a strange guest, truly, for a wedding.

"Stop that, Beaulieu," cried the young officer. "This is no place for such language."

"Do you suppose I pay attention to you?" demanded the infuriated man. "You meet me on the road. You lie to me. You don't know where she is, you say! And then you rush here and laugh at her poor old father behind his back—laugh till he find out by accident and come here to save his girl from shame and disgrace."

He screamed and leaped up and down. He shook his arms above his head. He did not pick words in his rage. He vented vicious insults without knowing what he said.

Supple Jack Hebert had won his sobriquet by his agility. He leaped forward and thrust his palm against the obscene mouth.

"This is my son's wedding night. There are good women and nice young girls here. We don't listen to that talk!"

When Hebert took away his hand, Beaulieu, cowed, was at the other extreme of his variable emotions. He was weeping.

"I have bad friends. They laugh at me behind my

back. They help a sneak to steal my girl. They let a poor old father lose his girl."

Curious eyes were searching the faces of the three principals.

Evangeline turned away sobbing, her crimson face shielded by her hands. She leaned her head against the rough walls of the little house.

"I have a word to say here," cried Aldrich. He towered like a giant among them, those sturdy little Acadians. "Silence!" With one stride he was close to Vetal, and set a heavy hand on the father's shoulder with pressure which intimidated the flabby publican.

"This is the second time, Beaulieu, you have abused your daughter in my hearing—abused her more shamefully than any other man in this wide world would abuse her—and you're her father! Not one word! I am speaking now!"

He dominated them. His mien, his passion, the fury of his resolve to protect her, made him one to be feared. They crowded about, lips apart, eyes upraised.

"This is Vetal Beaulieu. You know him. You know his place. It is not for me to interfere between father and daughter. I have not done so."

"She is my girl," mourned Vetal.

"I ask you fathers and mothers who have girls if you would want them to live at Beaulieu's Place, where men yell their drunken songs half the night through and stagger about the yard in the daytime? No, I know you would not," he cried, when they muttered indignantly. "And I know what you think of a father who comes here tonight to take his daughter to that place which she has left in sorrow and shame."

"She is my girl," insisted Beaulieu.

"That is all there is to this man's wicked anger—what

I have told you. His daughter came away because he would not be a good man and give her a home she could live in as a good girl should."

His simple-phrased little speech had produced its effect —he understood the nature of the border people.

"It is no business of yours," muttered Beaulieu, who understood the nature of border people also.

"It is the business of every honest man on this boundary-line to protect the name of a good Acadian girl—even if it is her father who is telling untruths about her," declared Aldrich, with vigor. There was no melodrama in his words or actions. His tones were low. But he spoke from his heart — his whole nature on fire in her defense.

"I know Vetal Beaulieu's place in Monarda clearing," stated old Rancourt, judicially. "And it's no place for a girl's home."

"It is as good as a home on stolen land," blazed Vetal. "You steal your land to live on up here and then turn up your noses at some other man's business. I want my girl. She shall come home. I do not allow Yankee spies and squatters who steal land to run my business."

Anaxagoras Billedeau stood on the stoop of the new house, his fiddle hugged to his breast.

"I know your place, too," he said. "And when I came to your girl, where you had turned her out on the road with no money, I brought her along with me. And I say, too, until you have changed about, Beaulieu, and have chosen a husband for her who is not a renegade among poor girls he has deceived, then I am the better father for your girl than you are."

This from a beggar struck Beaulieu, the rich man of the border, like a blow across the mouth. He was speechless. But his arm worked, though his tongue would not.

He lunged forward and lashed his whip across the old fiddler's face.

"More yet would I suffer for her sake—to do some service for a poor girl who needs friends," said Billedeau, not flinching.

Aldrich thrust the infuriated Beaulieu back.

"I will have my girl. I shall make some bad trouble here."

"I have promised Evangeline that I will carry her to St. Attegat where the good Père Leclair will advise her and help her to find work in the big school," Billedeau informed those who stood about and who looked on him with compassion, for the stripe of the lash marked his pale face. "I do not stand between father and daughter, but I have talked long with the girl, as we have come toward the north, and I think she has no home until Vetal Beaulieu changes into a better man."

Evangeline had turned to face them. She resembled some frightened creature at bay, as she leaned against the wall of the little house.

"You lie to me. I know what is behind it all," sneered the father. "The Yankee sneak is stealing my girl. He has hired this old cheat of a fiddler to take her away. He doesn't dare to do it himself in the eyes of the folks of the border. And you—all of you are helping him."

"I don't like such talk from you," said Supple Jack, severely.

"And I'll not endure such talk," cried Aldrich. Anger, grief, and love swept away prudence. The sight of the anguished girl, humiliated so cruelly, so wantonly, before them all, took from him the self-restraint that had governed him at the first meeting, when she had been shamed as ruthlessly as now. He walked up to the girl. He put out his hands, and after a time she surrendered her hands

to him. "You may listen, good folks who are here," he said. "I love Evangeline Beaulieu with all my heart and soul. I have never spoken of love to her before. But I want you all to understand it. I want only the right word to go out about us. I love her honestly, and I ask her love in return."

Under other circumstances, in other places, that declaration before gaping onlookers would have been cruel affront to a girl's modesty. But Aldrich knew the border. In that primitive region where love spoke out when it was honest and clean, any subterfuge in matters of the heart provoked suspicion. A girl's reputation was at stake. Rumors travel fast in Acadia—the lie as fast as the truth. He knew that the story of Beaulieu's daughter would flash from tongue to tongue along the border.

"A man has a right to love a girl," he said. "I'll leave it to you if I am to be blamed for loving Evangeline Beaulieu."

"If she has ever given you that fine look what she give you now, you would be a very queer man if you did not love her," remarked Supple Jack, with a soulfulness that started a ripple of laughter.

"Let it be known that I love her. And I'll not let any man insult her—not even her own father."

She had not spoken. Her eyes told him all. He pressed her hands, released them, and stepped back to the astounded and goggling Vetal.

"That is the way it stands, sir. You will have to make the best of it. When you are in a different frame of mind I will come to you and talk as man to man."

The power to speak seemed to have left Vetal. There in the circle of faces he squinted about him in the dim moonlight. There was no misunderstanding the attitude of the throng. They were against him.

"You better go off home, Vetal," advised old Rancourt. "We are good friends to your girl, and we don't think your place is the best place for her."

They looked for him to rage, but he did not.

"I have promised her to marry Dave Roi," he said, dully. "My word is given. I have no fight with you people, who have been fooled with lies. So I will go home."

Evangeline ran after him, when he turned and started toward his wagon.

"Father, I say again—I say it before all these friends, I will go home with you—I will be a loving daughter if you will give up the bad things and make it a home where a girl can live and be good."

"Will you help me keep my promise, then? Will you marry the man I have chosen for you?" He stared over her head at Aldrich with venom.

"No," she faltered. "No!" She said it more firmly.

Vetal's brief self-repression was shattered. His voice broke with the shrill tones of hysteria.

"It is you—you who steal a girl from her father and make trouble in an Acadian home, where women have obey." He threatened Aldrich with his fists. "She has not been Beaulieu's girl since she saw you at St. Basil, you Yankee spy! You have put the notions into her head. It will be said that Beaulieu's own girl has mocked him —has run off with a Yankee. The men who come on my place will grin at me. I have no more comfort. Even the men who owe me money will laugh behind my back. You have done it all!"

"I'll talk to you when you are a man again," repeated the officer.

"You have told them to listen to *you!* Now I tell them to listen to *me*. Send this word along the border. You shall not have my girl."

He walked backward, his arms vibrating above his head.

"Hear what I say! You shall not have my girl. I'll kill you first so that there shall be one Yankee sneak the less!"

"That's the very bad talk, Vetal," warned Supple Jack. "For when a man threatens and the news goes wide about, then it may happen that there will be blood on his head, if not on his hands." He pointed to the officer's bandaged arm. "There are bad men on this border—and your talk may make them bolder."

"If it makes any man so bold that he will shoot and kill, then I'll go to prison for it if no one else is found," raved Beaulieu. He climbed into his wagon, lashed his horse, and the little group listened in shocked silence till his curses died in the distance.

Aldrich drew the girl to him and soothed her as one seeks to comfort a grieving child.

"I hope you will take this word of advice from me without thinking I'm the meddlesome man," said Hebert, wistfully.

"I know advice from you is from a friend, after this night."

"So soon as this word goes along the border, then what happens to you or to Vetal Beaulieu, if any bad thing does happen, it will make sorrow and trouble." He nodded meaningly at the dark curls of the downcast head.

"I understand. But I want it known that I carry no grudge. I am sorry for him. I hope he will come to himself and see matters in a different light. M'ser Hebert, I have been outspoken this evening so that there might be no misunderstanding about my affairs."

"There are bad men on the border. You shall be very careful, or much trouble will come. You shall think very

hard before you do this or that. For Vetal Beaulieu has men who hate him and owe money to him. A coward may choose this chance."

It was solicitous warning from a man who had watched the machinations of border feuds for many years.

"I think much some days—I sit and think much. I am not jolly all the time like I used to be. My wife she notice that," he burst out in sudden confession. "It seems like very bad things are in the air—someway—somehow. It is not the same on the border in these days. Once we were here alone—just the poor Acadians. Perhaps it's only because I'm getting old that I dream in the night and wake and am very frightened. But I hope, M'ser, that you will be very careful. It is the day of my son's wedding, and I feel very sorry for folks who love each other and have much trouble because they love. For we poor folks do not have much except the good wife and the nice children."

"I have brought my trouble here to spoil the wedding-feast," lamented Evangeline. "I am sorry."

"You shall not think so," declared the young bridegroom, coming to her, leading his girl wife by the hand. "We are truly sorry for you, dear Mam'selle, and we hope your worst trouble is all past, and that you will soon be as happy as we are."

The wife kissed the sorrowing girl on the cheek.

"Ah, let us have light hearts at a wedding," cried Billedeau from the stoop. He set his fiddle under his chin. He began to play. The weal of the whiplash was across his cheek, but his wrinkled face was alight with smiles. "'Dites la jeune belle, que voulez-vous allez?'" he sang, stamping his feet in time to the fiddle.

Then he faced about and marched gaily into the house;

and they followed, marching two and two to the lilt of the music.

Aldrich touched Evangeline on the arm, appeal in his eyes, and she waited beside him until the others were within the house.

There was no one to spy. The instinctive delicacy of the French temperament realized that these two would have something to say to each other.

He knelt before her, for in no other way could he exhibit what his heart prompted. Mere words would not express all he felt. Act must accompany them. He bent his head. He had tossed his cap upon the ground. She gazed down through her tears, restraining her impulse to clasp his head to her breast. He kissed her hand slowly and then lifted his eyes to hers.

"Forgive me, Evangeline, for the brutal thing I did before them all. I should have waited. Such love as I have for you is a sacred treasure. I did not mean to show it. But I wanted them to understand for your sake. Now I tell you that I love you. I kneel for your forgiveness, dearest. I took much for granted. But there are times in love when one must be bold."

She put her soft hands against his cheeks and raised him gently. He came to his feet before her.

"Yes, there are times when one must be bold," she replied. "It is bold for me to be here—to say what I am going to say to you. But I am not a coquette. Wait one moment!" His arms were about her. "There will not be other moonlight nights for us very soon. I am going to my work. The people there will not understand as these folks here understand. You must not come to the big school to court the daughter of Vetal Beaulieu. So I tell you now I love you—I love you—I am not ashamed. I love you."

Her arms went up around his neck, and he smothered her words in a kiss in which soul pledged soul.

A moment later she struggled from his arms.

"It is forever," she gasped. "It is my pledge to you forever. An Acadian girl gives her lips to only one. When all our clouds have cleared away and you shall come for me I will be waiting."

He called her back. She was about to enter the house, thinking that he would follow.

He folded her in his arms once more and kissed her.

"It is good night," he whispered. "I can't go in there now. I want to take my joy out under the moon and the stars and consecrate myself to it. Good night, my beautiful Evangeline. I will watch over you—I will be near to help you when you need help. But I understand what your life must be until our troubles are arranged; I'll be prudent—but I shall keep on loving you."

He released her and called his adieus to those within. He waved them back when they rushed out with words of protest.

"I must ride on—I cannot wait even for the wedding-feast." He took the glass which Hebert thrust at him. "I drink happiness to bride and groom, and to all within." He turned up the glass and sprinkled the last drops on the threshold.

He shut his eyes after he mounted his horse, so that he might keep the memory of the glorified face he had singled from all the others when he turned from the open door.

The thrill of her kiss was on his lips and the joy of "I love you" was singing in his heart.

VIII

AN EDICT IN ACADIA

THOUGH wet clouds swung low in the morning and the robins were chirruping for rain, Fiddler Billedeau was ready for the road betimes.

"I have a passenger," he said, when the good folks urged him to wait. He understood the look Evangeline had given him. "The summer showers will not harm. The sun will smile and dry us. We must hurry on to the north."

The men, the women, and the children of Rancourt's clearing crowded about the old buckboard. The girls tied flowers from the wedding bouquets upon the horse's bridle and trimmed the thills with strands of creeping evergreen.

"You shall come again to Bois-de-Rancourt for the next wedding," declared Supple Jack to the girl. "And all the poor folks will walk many miles some day just to hear the bells ring for you, Mam'selle Beaulieu," he added, roguishly.

"Ah, they surely will ring all in the good time," old Rancourt assured her. His shrill tones threaded the gay laughter.

Then the laughter ceased, for two men were tramping toward the group, coming across the plot smoothed for the dancing. Hebert scowled when he saw them.

"The devil he hides behind some near tree when Vincent and L'Heureux come past this way," he growled.

As they came close he called their names and greeted them.

They did not reply amiably.

"You call us those names, eh, to make us mad some more?" demanded one of the men. He pushed his grizzly beard belligerently close to Hebert's face.

"Those names were good enough for your fathers," retorted Supple Jack, stoutly.

"It's time to stop being Canucks when you come to live on the States. My name is Twentyhundred—I tell you that for the last time."

"My name is Happy," said the other man. "And I hope I don't have to tell you that again."

"When you think less about old grandfathers and think more about the new country where you have come to live, you will get along better, you folks," stated Vincent, who had so grotesquely Yankeefied his name.

"I can be a good citizen, and not make myself very funny with a Yankee name," insisted Hebert. "If our good L'Abbé have to call himself Libby, and St. Clair turn himself into Sinkler, and—"

"We have not time to bother only about our own names," broke in Vincent. "We are here to ask you why you have not done as those papers have told you to do. They are the law papers, and we hand them to you many weeks ago, and you have had plenty of time."

Hebert drew a document from his pocket, plainly a legal form. It was worn and soiled with much handling.

"Yes, I get this from you. I have study it much. We all have study. But it tells us to do what we cannot do."

"What does it tell you to do? We don't want any

misunderstanding about this. What does that paper tell you to do?"

"It tells us to leave this land where our homes are," cried Hebert. "But it cannot be so. I think we do not understand."

His tones expressed incredulity, protest, grief. The others crowded more closely about. The men brandished papers whose worn edges and tattered corners revealed with what assiduity they had been read. There was a chorus of expostulation.

Vincent raised his hands and stopped the clamor.

"Myself and Mr. Happy, here, are deputy sheriffs. We have nothing to do with making laws. We don't own this land. We do not make out those papers. You are living here on land that belongs to other men. You came here and squatted when they did not know. Now they tell you to leave. I explain it all when I was here with those papers. But you didn't pay any attention, you people. You thought it was just the old story over again. You thought it was only threatening, just the same as it has been along the border here."

"But these papers, they cannot turn us out of the houses we have built! There was no room on the river. We must live somewhere. Our grandfathers found this country up here. We cannot go away," protested Hebert.

"What you folks want to do is get up to date a little," stated Vincent with disgust. "You're living on notions a hundred years old."

"We are not selling out to the Yankees and making a living off the troubles of poor people after we have changed our names."

"We would be bad men if we did not do what the law tells us to do when papers are put into our hands. You have had the warning to move. You did not move.

You laughed at the law—you laughed at us behind our backs."

"No, we have been very sad—but we could not believe."

"So I notice. You've even been to work and built another house here—on another man's land, chopping down another man's timber."

"But my son have marry! He must have his home!"

"Look here, Hebert," said Vincent, getting briskly to business, "go talk all that to the lawyers and to the men who own this land, or to any one else. Happy and I have our orders. If you don't get off this land to-day, quietly, we've got orders to put you off by force. If we put you off by force we shall arrest every grown-up man here for trespass, and take you to jail. We don't want to do that, because it will leave your families in a bad way. Go peaceably, and the trespass cases will be dropped. Now that's straight business, and I'm talking to you man fashion."

"No, we shall not go. We shall not leave our homes. We have no place but this one."

"Happy and I have come up here alone—hoping you'd see what you have got to do and would do it—saving trouble for all hands. If you want trouble we can furnish it. We've got a special posse of twenty men down the road. We'll haul you men out of here to jail. It will be very bad, Hebert," he warned.

He threw back his coat and displayed his nickel badge. L'Heureux followed suit. Hebert clutched the tattered legal paper in his trembling hand and stared at the badges. The first drops of rain were falling. The drops trickled with the tears down the faces of sobbing women.

"Yes, it is very bad, Hebert," repeated Vincent. "But if you folks don't get up with the times and obey the

laws, you can't expect anything else. The law has to run things, or else there wouldn't be anything left to run in this country."

Evangeline had listened to the colloquy, her eager eyes searching the faces of the speakers, amazement deepening into veritable stupefaction. She dared to address this man, who came with his authority of the law and his brusque demands.

"Who is there in all the world so cruel as to command you to do this?"

The beauty of this stranger in the settlement had already had its effect on Vincent. He had been eyeing her with side glances while he talked. He lifted his hat.

"The owners of the timber-land, Mam'selle. They have posted signs—they have given orders and warnings—now they have gone to the law to save their property. These folks cut down timber, they set fires to burn slash, and the fires spread, and so much damage comes to the fine timber-lands. The owners must protect their property."

She remembered what Fiddler Billedeau had told her. The old man sat beside her in the buckboard, his hands propping his bowed head, sorrowing for his friends. He knew what the law demanded and commanded.

"Why will the rich folks of the States not sell some of this land?"

"It's not the place for settlers where the big trees are. They have money to buy only little strips here and there. They only nick into the sides of the woods. Then the fires spread from their clearings and much loss comes. It is hard for these people, Mam'selle. But they were warned. They should not be here."

All were listening. They were hoping against hope.

The rough Vincent was speaking gently to her. Their simple-minded faith looked up to her. The grave self-control of the girl impressed even the deputies.

"They have no other place," she said. "The valley is crowded. The little farms are all taken. You tell them they must go. But where may they go?"

He fumbled his grizzled beard with uncertain fingers, squinting at her.

"It's quite a question, Mam'selle. But it's nothing I have anything to do with. They have had their warning and their notice. Best thing I can suggest is that they go out and squeeze in among their relatives along the river until they can settle with the landowners—the landowners will pay something to them—there's something in the law about it. They can take the money and go to the mills in the big cities. There is plenty of work in the mills. I have folks there. The Yankees want the Canadians to come to the mills. So, you see, it's best for these folks to go along out of here without trouble. The landowners will be more generous if they go without trouble."

"Then they must go? There is no other way?" Her voice trembled with appeal.

With mouths open, eyes staring in silent, frenzied appeal, they all turned from her to the officer. The silence was breathless. The wet wind swirled across the smoothed ground, where the faded flowers of the wedding frisked in pathetic imitation of the gay folks who had danced there the night before.

"There is just nothing else to do—nothing else to do. The say isn't mine, Mam'selle. Perhaps I talked rough a little while ago. But they have twitted me that I have sold out to the Yankees. They have sneered because I am earning my living by carrying out the laws that the big

men have made. They sneer at all who carry out the laws on the border."

She flushed, and Vincent did not understand why.

"I must do my duty. I must do it now. If others talk to the big men and ask them to change the laws I shall be glad—for it is all very bad—very bad."

The folks of Rancourt clearing understood. The edict was irrevocable. The wailing of the women was heart-rending.

"My God, the bad fate is on the poor Acadians," cried Hebert. "And you have taken us for the example, Pierre Vincent. The poor people of Bois-de-Rancourt, they must be thrown out of the homes they have worked hard to build."

"There's no example about this scrape, Hebert. You happen to be the first ones. You have been cutting and slashing and building lately, and they have got after you, these owners have. The other trespassers will have to go, too. It's going to be a clean sweep. That's the truth, though there may not be much comfort in it for you folks."

Old Billedeau straightened. His face was grim—his eyes were hard. The ruthlessness of this attack on his humble friends, the families of the border scattered in their little hamlets, had aroused him.

"And what do you think will happen up and down this river, between St. Agathe and the St. Croix, Mister Twentyhundred, when all the folks are driven off these fifty thousand acres?"

"I think they'll have to go, Fiddler Billedeau."

"You were a Vincent before you grew so big as to be Mister Twentyhundred, and so you have Acadian blood. So you ought to know that the very patient people are the very bad ones when homes are taken and their poor wives and children are put out-of-doors."

"If they want the kind of trouble they'll get by starting in to fight the whole United States, all they've got to do is say the word. But they'd better understand that in this world the law has the last say-so."

"It's a bad word to go up and down the border—the word you bring here to-day. The law says thus-and-so. Very well! But when the law takes homes away from women and children and gives them no land—no roof—then men forget the law. The Acadian blood can make some very bad men out of good men, Mister Twenty-hundred."

"You'd better have over mighty little of that talk, Billedeau."

"I am not the one who will make it. It will be made by some others than a poor fiddler."

The officer turned away. He found conversation profitless. He saw obstinacy in the faces of the men about him.

"You have your wagons and horses," he said, curtly, to Hebert. "Begin to load your stuff. This thing must be done. You must move. If not, I shall serve these warrants and take you away to jail."

He drew a packet of papers from his coat and beat them on his palm.

He put two fingers in his mouth and whistled shrilly.

He saw that their spirits were broken by the news he had brought. It was time to rush this thing before their Acadian natures had time to rally to the other extreme.

"I'm only calling my men to help," he told Hebert. "They do not come to arrest or make trouble, if you move spry. They will load your wagons."

The men came into the clearing promptly. The sight of them quelled all spirit of rebellion.

"Oh, I cannot believe that it will be done," stammered Evangeline, clutching Billedeau's arm.

"We'd better go," he returned, tears on his cheeks. "It will be done."

She leaped from the buckboard's seat and went among the weeping women, trying to comfort them; but her own sobs checked her speech.

The men rolled the settlers' wagons before the doors of the houses and began their work. Stolidly, bowing to the decree, the men of the settlement toiled with the volunteers. The little houses were scantily furnished. There were many for the task, and the wagons were soon loaded. At last the horses were harnessed, and the pathetic procession moved.

"You've all got relatives on the river road," Vincent advised them. "They'll take you in until you can get your feet placed."

"Your damn Yankee pigs—they have left no place for these people to place their feet," blazed Hebert, walking ahead of his horse. "They buy the land—all the land. They need it only to grow their trees. We need it for our homes. But they have their homes. They do not care."

Women and children walked in the road behind the wagons. They carried fragile articles in their arms. They stopped and gazed back at the empty houses and trudged on.

It all had happened so soon, had been accomplished with such grim celerity, that Evangeline could scarcely credit her senses, when she stared about the little settlement. She had remained until the last. Billedeau had drawn his horse to one side so that the procession might have clear way for the loaded wagons.

The doors were swung wide. One or two rude toys which had been dropped by frightened children lay in the yard near her. She picked them up so that she might restore them. The little new house which had harbored

joy for one night seemed to gaze at her with its gable windows, and the door was open wide like a mouth expressing horror. There was almost a human expression in the gable—houses wear such when one observes with a bit of imagination.

The fine rain had made the flowers of the dancing-ground sodden, and they lay still.

The girl went to Billedeau and climbed to the seat of the old wagon.

"And it was only last night that your fiddle sang to them and they laughed here," she said, choking. "I try to believe it's true, what I am looking at, M'ser Billedeau. I try to understand it. I cannot."

As they turned the corner of the trees she looked behind, her eyes on the new house—her gaze on the door beside which she had stood when Aldrich held her in his arms. The little house marked the spot where her woman's soul was given to another—where she had heard the dearest words a woman's ears can receive—the little house still gave her its look of dumb horror.

"If this is only the first one, there are bad times ahead for this border," mourned the old man. "It is good to be patient—it is wise, sometimes, to be meek—but some men who stay away from here and make the laws and hire them carried out—those men may find there is hot fire under the old ashes. I am frightened when I think."

They followed the sad procession down the winding road to the river and waved farewells and saw it depart in search of shelter among the little cottages that were already overcrowded.

Billedeau slapped the reins on the flanks of his old horse and turned him north.

Evangeline found in her hands the rude toys she had brought from the settlement.

"I will keep them," she whispered to herself. "One shall be my token of joy. The other shall remind me every day that the poor people of the border must suffer until some one goes to the rich men—some one who is wise and bold."

The old fiddler put some of her own thoughts into words.

"Those big men far away from here—they who sleep on their stacks of dollar bills like pigs on straw—they cannot be made sorry, for their hearts are too hard, but perhaps they can be made ashamed."

"Where do they live, M'ser Billedeau?"

"Very far, Mam'selle. I don't know where. They do not come to see what they own. The money takes legs and hurries away to them as fast as the trees are cut down and sold. But, wherever they live, I wish it could be known what they make the poor folks suffer, and then good men would point their fingers and make them ashamed in the place where they live."

"That is not the way," she cried hotly, flashing her eyes at the meek old man. "They should be dragged here by strong men. They should be made to look on while the women and children are turned out of their homes. Then, if they did not relent, strong men should beat their faces and make them give justice."

He blinked at her, startled by this sudden outburst in one whom he had thought so gentle. He found in her face the same expression that had made Vetal Beaulieu quail—that had cowed David Roi.

"It is there—it is underneath—it is in the Acadian blood," he pondered. "It is most of all in the women. But it is in the men when they are backed to the wall. It is not wise, what the rich men plan to do."

IX

THE PARISH OF GOOD FATHER LECLAIR

THE good Père Leclair was on his knees. He was not at his devotions.

In overalls and jumper he was crawling about on the moist and odorous soil of his kitchen garden. He always weeded his vegetables as scrupulously as he kept the tares from his daily life.

The warm sun caressed his bent back—the frisky June breeze played with the long locks of his white hair. An old hound, to whom the garden's neat expanse was ground forbidden, sat on the edging turf as near as he dared and beamed on his master with adoring eyes.

The garden was on a fair and fertile slope which stretched from the little stone house to the river whose broad breast was flashing that June day with sunlight from a myriad of facets.

Father Leclair's great barn towered over the little stone house. The parish of Attegat paid in tithes to the priest—with potatoes, with beans, with corn, with hay and oats for his two cows and his chunky horse. So the barn was big—and the priest's purse was tiny, and money seldom chinked in it.

The poorer folks of Attegat parish understood the secrets of the big barn. What the prosperous farmers tugged with good-will in through the broad front doors, Father Leclair slyed out the little back door to the needy

or the sick. For thirty years his big barn had been the clearing-house where thrift and good-fortune discounted the bitter present of the unfortunate through the hands of Father Leclair.

Thrift understood, and did not complain. After thirty years the good priest who has welcomed the infants, joined the hands of lovers and stroked the wrinkled lids shut over dead eyes, may exact a bit tyrannically when it is for a good cause. The prosperous smiled when Father Leclair exacted—and loved his ways.

Norman Aldrich, riding up from the south, knew where he would find the priest that bright morning. He knotted the bridle reins about the tethering-rail in front of the stone house, nodded greeting to the ancient housekeeper, whose gnarled face peered between the potted geraniums in the kitchen window, and walked around to the garden.

The old hound gave one "woof" of warning; a second yelp was meant for greeting to a friend.

Father Leclair peered under the broad brim of his flat hat, waved his hand, and trod gingerly in from the garden plot to the turf.

"No, my son, you are not taking me from my task," he declared, smiling, checking the young man's apologies. "The task is finished, and the sun is warm out here." He put his arm through Norman's and led him toward the house. "We will sit down and drink some of Mother Bissette's cool buttermilk."

Father Leclair brought the stone mugs of buttermilk into the study, where Aldrich waited for him. A well-worn cassock and a shabby calotte had replaced the garden garb.

"Your health, bold scout for Uncle Sam," cried the priest with jovial cheer, raising his mug. He reached

forward suddenly and touched the bandaged arm. "A hurt, my son?" he asked, with solicitude in his tones.

"A smuggler's bullet," explained Aldrich, his lips tightening grimly.

"I did not think they would dare to use bullets on this border. There have been bad deeds, but bullets—no, I did not think they would ever dare."

"Fists and clubs have been about their limit, but this affair was a bit unusual. Such a thing may not happen again. A drunken man hired by a smuggler—that was it! The smuggler had three thousand sheep at stake. I was alone."

"Who was that smuggler?" asked the priest, sternly.

"The worst of them all—Dave Roi."

"And you did not catch him, then?"

"He was careful to stay on his own side of the line—as usual when there is danger. Oh, I do not complain of my wound, Father Leclair. It is a lucky hurt—a shot through the flesh is lucky, but I think that is only a part of the good-fortune: we officers have been obliged to turn the other cheek too long on this border. We have had to be mild and peaceful tabbies. Perhaps now our superiors down in the city at the desks will understand better what we are face to face with up here. We can't stop smuggling until we are allowed to fight the smugglers according to their own code. After my report of this affair, orders were wired me to carry a rifle."

The priest had listened, uttering little clucks of alarm.

"I do not like the sound of all this, my son. Matters will grow much worse."

"Ah, I fear what I said sounded bloodthirsty, good father. I did not mean it that way. I do not want to shoot men. What I hope is that when it is known far and wide that the officers bear arms for their protection,

and to make the laws respected, the smugglers will think twice before they start trouble."

"It may happen for the best that way." But the priest continued to shake his head doubtfully.

He was too much occupied with his own thoughts to note the growing embarrassment of his guest. The young man tried once or twice to start a subject and paused in some confusion.

"I'm sure you do not think that Dave Roi would make a girl a good husband, Father Leclair," he blurted at last.

"Not I!" declared the priest with vigor. "He has cursed too many poor girls already with what he calls his love."

"You will not think it strange, then, I hope, if I tell you I have come here as avant courier for a girl who is in danger. Her father has promised her to that man—a betrothal according to the Acadian custom, and she has been obliged to leave home."

"Her name!" demanded the priest with prompt interest.

"Evangeline Beaulieu." He faltered the name—he caressed it with his tones. The color heightened in his tanned cheeks. "She has been in the convent of St. Basil."

"Ah, I know her—I know her! She has been the ward of the convent school since she was a tot of a child. A rare maid is she! I have seen her there many times!"

"She is coming to you for advice and help, father. I saw her on her way. I offered to speak of her to you so that you might take counsel with yourself before she comes. She hopes that you may recommend her as a teacher at the new training-school." He went on hurriedly, explaining more fully the plight of the homeless girl.

"Certainly I shall help," declared Father Leclair, with enthusiasm. "I have watched the girl through the years. She will make a fine teacher in the new school. I have some influence—ah, yes, though I must whisper it for fear the bishop may hear and blame me, I have some influence with those at the head of the new Yankee school. I shall not wait." He tossed away his old skull-cap and took down his broad hat from its hook. "I will go now to the school principal so that I may have some good news to add to my words of consolation, when she comes. Sympathy is sweet, but good news satisfies the hungry heart more completely, my son," he added, with a shrewd wink.

Celerity in doing good was one of Father Leclair's leading characteristics.

He trotted away down the dusty road, his cassock bobbing against his hurrying heels. Aldrich looked after him with a smile and was far from resenting this brusqueness of departure. He mounted his horse with lighter heart. He knew the good priest had not required this intercession in her behalf; but the thought that he had done her the small service of preparing for her reception comforted him. His soul longed for opportunities to serve her, and there was so little he could do.

She could not be far from Attegat now, he reflected.

It was the second day since he had seen her at the wedding.

On the chance of meeting her where he could drop a comforting word concerning the prospects awaiting her at Attegat, he rode south. He realized that he must not compromise Mademoiselle Beaulieu, teacher of youth at the training-school, with lover-like attentions. He would need to negative by discreet actions the angry charges of Vetal Beaulieu.

Just now, however, she was Evangeline, his sweetheart,

a homeless girl, who needed consolation. So he spurred his horse, and he cantered south at a gait which stirred rumors of desperate trouble somewhere along the border.

Good Father Leclair hurried on, his eyes on the great structure which dominated the village of Attegat.

Past the huddled houses, the stores, the tavern, he trotted at his best gait, bobbing greeting to those who respectfully saluted him. The frank sunshine showed up the frayed seams of his robe, but the folks of the parish had discovered long before that it was of no use to give Father Leclair a purse to be used for new raiment. After such presentations it would be noticed that children in interesting numbers appeared at church with new boots or new caps. The old cassock would continue to flutter along the streets of Attegat.

He was through the village, nearly to the school on the hill, and no one had succeeded in detaining him. A woman came running from her door, and cried shrilly to him.

"Will you not stop, Père Leclair? I have something for your ears."

"Not now! I am in a great hurry."

"I beg you to stop."

He did not halt. He hastened the faster.

"There will be time," he told her over his shoulder, begrudging the breath, for the hill was ahead of him.

In such spirited fashion was the business of homeless Evangeline Beaulieu prosecuted for her! Such zeal requires its reward. A half-hour later Father Leclair came down the hill, slowly, calm and content in his heart. A new teacher had been engaged for the summer term of the big school on his recommendation.

The woman came from her door again.

"This time I will come in, for I have business with

you, Madame Ouillette," he said, before she could speak again of her own business. "The big school has just hired a very fine young maid from St. Basil, as a new teacher, and she will be pleased to engage a room in your house and buy her food from you. I shall bring her here, eh?"

He was indoors as he finished speaking.

"That is good news," she said, but her face had suddenly lost its smile that was half a simper. "A poor widow needs the few pennies she can earn. It is good news." She rolled toil-stained hands in her apron. She sighed. "It must be because of this he has been smiling."

Father Leclair understood. As real pastor of his flock, sharer of the secrets of his people, he understood. He frowned momentarily, then he chuckled. He drew his spectacles from their case and hooked them across his nose. He peered up at a huge portrait on the wall—a crude thing done on Bristol-board with crayons.

"Yes, he smiles to-day," agreed Father Leclair.

"Something else had happened. It was not about the new teacher! He has been smiling for some days. I was to ask you about it, father. But I suppose the good news you have brought is why he has been smiling."

Her disappointment was evident.

The priest examined the warped picture with which moisture and sun had played its pranks for so long.

"This time it was a fine smile," she went on, wistfully. "But it must have been about the new teacher."

"Ah, I see there has been another suitor, Madame Ouillette. It was on that affair you called me, eh?"

"It is Napoleon Lajeunesse, the brave riverman. He thinks he will leave the river and settle in Attegat. He has spoken to me."

Father Leclair gazed up again, judicially, at the features of the departed Monsieur Ouillette. He always

humored the vagaries of his poor people, did Father Leclair. He did not scoff at the little superstitions. In the case of the simple-hearted folks, the honest and the great faith is often built on the foundation of the little superstitions. For ten years he had humored Madame Ouillette in her belief as to the "haunted portrait." He had been called to translate for her its demoniacal scowls, its placid resignation, its grotesque grins. With a few brusque words he could have destroyed her comforting belief that the spirit of the departed Ouillette was with her to counsel and to understand for her with spiritual insight—twisting his pictured face to make her know. But Father Leclair, indulgent and tactful with the children of his flock, did not go about tearing their little consolations away from his people.

And, in the past, he found that the picture had helped him in winning the lonely widow—too credulous, too soft-hearted—away from suitors whom he, in his wider knowledge of men, did not approve.

"I think good friend Xavier smiles because he knows that the girl who is coming will be sunshine in your lonely house, Madame Ouillette. For is it not settled that I shall bring her? As to Lajeunesse, we shall see. We shall watch the picture. But I think it will soon begin to frown." The priest had had ten years' experience with the probabilities in the matter of the warped cardboard. "It will frown when the matter of Lajeunesse comes more to the fore, if he persists in courting you. For Lajeunesse is a very lazy man, and he loafed while his first wife toiled. Yes, it is as you say; he is a brave man. But a brave man who sits in the kitchen becomes very much of a nuisance. You will not be so lonely when the girl is here. And she will be a boarder who will pay—not a boarder who will boss and refuse to pay, as a lazy husband might."

"I am the fortunate woman," she declared. Her face had cleared. "I have the spirit of my good husband to watch over me, and the good Father Leclair speaks the words as my Xavier would speak them. So I shall never worry. And I will have my best room ready for the new teacher when you bring her."

"The good God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," said Father Leclair to himself, as he trotted down toward the village. "I hope I am forgiven for diluting the truth to the understanding of the poor lambs who are thereby saved from the pitfalls and the shears."

On his way to the school he had passed through a village which was placid under the warm sun. Men had lounged in the shade, and the horses of those who had come to market dozed at the hitching-posts.

He came back into a village which was upheaved by emotion, noisy with excitement.

Here and there, in the middle of the dusty road, groups of men clamored comment and argument, beating their fists into their palms. Women stood at their doors, their shrill voices carrying far.

"It was the word which came yesterday, Father Leclair," shouted a man who thrust himself out of a chattering group at sight of the priest. "But no one believed. We thought it was only some of the threats. But it has been done—it has been done!"

An elderly man, thin, with stooped shoulders under a shiny frock-coat, came to the priest. He was Notary Pierre Gendreau, the old and cherished friend of Father Leclair, willing to sit long hours over a chess-board, smoking his pipe and proving by comforting silence the best attributes of friendship.

"They have begun to put the people off the lands," he explained. "The first eviction was at Rancourt's clear-

ing yesterday. I have known it must come. It is the law."

"Oh, but it's not justice, good notary," cried the priest, his face working with emotion. "You and I understand —and it's not justice."

"I had been hoping it might be postponed. Something could have been done if the wise men had been reached in time. There has been too much delay. But I believe that there are good men and powerful men in this State who do not want to have these honest citizens driven out. A State needs such citizens. I hoped the poor folks would be let alone until some words could be spoken to the next legislative assembly."

"There has been too much hope and too little action," complained the priest. "The Acadians season even their dry potatoes with hope. Hope is a comfort, notary; I don't know how our poor people would get along without it. But hope is a crumbly rock as a foundation for business. Perhaps I must bear my share of responsibility for this misfortune. But a parish priest could only make poor shift in politics or the law."

"I hoped that in the end they would allow the settlers to buy," confessed the old notary. "A few on the older tracts of cleared land have been allowed to buy. I have been making the deeds. I did not think the threats would be carried out."

While they talked men had been crowding about them, mouths open, necks craned.

They got no consolation from the words or the faces of the priest and the notary.

There were men from outside the village, men whose homes were on land to which they held no title.

"I am a poor man. I do not know books or writing, Father Leclair," cried one, brokenly. "You know; you

have read all the wise things. What shall I do to save my home when they come to turn my wife and children out-of-doors?"

"I do not know, Jean Bourdreau," returned the priest, sorrowfully. "The notary says it is the law—the owners of the land have the law with them. My books counsel submission to the law."

"The rich men make the law," shouted another of the group. "I have never been where they make the law. I am too poor to go there. All these men are too poor to go there. The law is made for us, and we cannot tell our side to any one until the law is made. And then men come up here with papers and turn us out of our homes and say the law allows it—commands it."

"I think it is time to find out about that law and how it is made!" shouted the first speaker.

"You are right, Bourdreau!" called some one in clarion tones. That shout rang from end to end of the street. It came from above their heads. All looked up.

Framed in an open window over the village post-office was a young man. A new gilt sign beside his window advertised "Louis Blais. Attorney-at-law."

"Listen to me, you who are Frenchmen and love your homes. It is time to know about the laws they are making down in the capitol halls. You are letting the Yankees make those laws to suit themselves. For ten years you have been voting to send to the assembly-legislative a Yankee from this district—a man who has been in, hand and glove, with the rest of his race—and now look at what has happened in this section! Good Acadian farmers are being put off their lands. Where is the law to protect the Acadians? It's all for the Yankees. The man who has been sent from here, because you have been fooled and lied

to, is ready to sell out to the rich men—he *has* sold out to the rich men!"

"False slander! Hush, Louis Blais!"

It was the voice of the priest. He came apart from the men in the roadway, and turned face of righteous indignation up at the open window.

"You are talking about my friend—the friend of all these people. You are attacking a good man. You are slandering our honest Representative Clifford."

The young man in the window hesitated for a moment. It was temerity—offering retort to the good priest of Attegat. But anxious men were staring up at him inquiringly. He realized that he was plucking at ripe occasion. There might never be such an opportunity for launching his ambitious plans, he told himself, while he stared down at Father Leclair's rebuking face.

"You have just told Jean Bourdreau that you have no counsel to give—no plan to suggest to save these threatened homes, good Father Leclair. I have a plan. I desire to tell it to these people."

"We are ready to listen," called many.

"You have been sending the wrong man to the assembly, my good friends."

"Again I command you to stop," cried the priest. "You shall have full time to state your plans, but you shall not climb to the favor of these hearers by leaping upon the shoulders of one of my good friends. You say these people have been lied to and fooled, Louis Blais? This concerns me. For I have advised them to vote for Representative Clifford."

"Why has he not brought home some good law to protect the homes that are now taken away?"

"Your talk is the talk of the reckless demagogue," cried the priest. "It is the curse of politics that good men who

cannot achieve impossibilities have men barking at their heels, trying to discredit honest effort. I will not allow you to pull wool over the eyes of these men, sir."

"The wool is there already—I'm trying to pull it away," insisted Blais, insolently.

The priest realized that a friend's cause was imperiled.

"Representative Clifford has worked hard for our people," declared Father Leclair, with loyal fervor. "He has brought home money for our roads—more money than has been given to other places, for he has explained that our folks are poor. The State has paid for all the bridges in the district. The State has built that fine new school up there where all the boys and girls of the river-valley may come and be taught free of charge."

"That school has been built so that the Yankees can teach your boys and girls to forget their language, their traditions, even their religion—it's a training-school to turn children into Yankees who can be used by the rich men," shouted Blais.

"That man lies," stated Father Leclair. He turned to his people. "Beware—beware—this is a time when a mistake that may ruin all of us can so easily be made. There is a dangerous man up in that window. He is shouting the word 'Yankee' at you to make trouble so that he may profit by the trouble. He wants you to believe that all Yankees are in league with those men who have bought the timber-lands, so that this present trouble and new anger of yours may make you rebels to the laws of the country in which you live. Listen to me, my people. Rebels must suffer in the end. That man wants you to be angry—to bluster—to fight. I have been watching him since he has come to our parish. This is not the time for hot young blood—for rash counsels. It is a time for care and patient thought so that the great men may under-

stand and pity us. We do not want them to fear and hate us."

His tones shook with the fervor of his appeal. He who had been so close to them all the years understood the present peril in all its possibilities.

"All you have heard year after year is 'Peace, peace' and 'Turn the other cheek,'" blustered the opportunist in the upper window. "It is time to stand together, my countrymen! Let's be Frenchmen together! I will speak straight out. Send me to your assembly instead of the Yankee who is trading away your rights. I will go down there to the capitol halls and put my fists under their noses and make them give you your rights."

The men cheered him. In their despair and new misery this arrogance, this bombastic assumption of power, caught their Gallic fancy, spurred their hopes.

"You silly boy, you are only provoking good men to hurt their best interest," stormed the priest. Standing there among them in the highway, in his worn, dusty cassock, he did not seem the leader their fancy demanded. That flushed, swaggering youth in the window, promising might to cope with might, filled their eyes. In moments of stress of emotion the demagogue succeeds best with his arrant buncombe. The men in the road were ready to grasp at straws. They did not trouble to wonder how this young man proposed to conquer when he went single-handed into the halls of law to force privileges for his section.

They looked up at him hopefully and cheered again, drowning the good father's appeals to their reason.

"The wolves think they have got us on the run," bellowed Blais. "It's their game to divide us and eat us piecemeal. That big school, weaning our children from Acadian language and customs, is one scheme of theirs

to divide us. A Yankee as our representative is another plan. But we will let them know that we are awake at last. Acadians, stand with me and stand together!"

He reached to one side and dramatically produced a flag wrapped about a short staff. He shook out the flag. It was a French tricolor.

"We shall rally under this, my people! Our cry shall be, 'For ourselves—for ourselves, at last!'"

The men in the road leaped and screamed. Their mercurial natures were stirred to the depths. Here at last was true expression, in the words and act of Blais, of their resentment—their bitter, sullen rage, their hatred toward those whom they now considered their oppressors.

The young lawyer was nailing the short staff to the sill of his window.

"This flag shall stay here, my people, as our rallying banner. It shall remind you that I am working for your interests. Remember me when it comes time to cast your votes."

Notary Pierre fingered his thin nose and squinted up at the flag.

"That may be bad in the eyes of the law. A French flag over the door of a post-office of the United States. I think it will make trouble," he suggested to the priest.

"That silly boy is thinking only how to push himself higher in the world. He does not care how much trouble he stirs," sputtered Father Leclair. "He will make fools of these people for his own ends. No, he shall not do so."

He trotted across the road and climbed the outside stairs which led to the attorney's office. He hurried across the room and extended a quivering finger, when Blais turned to face him. They were in plain sight of the gaping men below.

"Take down that insulting flag, Louis Blais."

"I shall decorate my office as I see fit, Father Leclair."

"That is not a decoration. There is the spirit of rebellion behind it—it stirs men to foolish rage against a good government under which they live. No good comes out of rage. No good comes out of fighting. Take down that flag. I command you."

"There is a time to fight. It is when men cannot get their rights in any other way. Our fathers fought."

"You shall not provoke these few poor people to ruin all—to spoil all their cause by senseless riot against authority—if that is what you propose. Take down that flag!"

"No."

The priest was little, was old. But the holy zeal which animated him was more potent than mere muscle. He brushed past Blais, broke the staff, and flung the flag down into the road.

"Not one word to me, sir," he cried. He faced the young man, his hand upraised. "I know you. I know your designs. You are not the true friend of these people. You are thinking only of yourself. It matters not what they suffer from fury and folly so long as you win for yourself."

He leaned out of the window.

"Go to your homes, my people. I tell you as your priest that I will put my hands to your affairs. I have prayed. Now I will work. There is a way. I will find it."

"Ask the good father if he will make the rich Yankees give back those homes to the people who have been turned out-of-doors," suggested Blais, calling to the men below.

Their eyes, upturned to his, asked the question mutely, but the priest had no answer for them. He understood their natures too well to attempt evasion.

With the simple directness of children they expected candor; they wanted performance, not promise.

Father Leclair realized what damage the demagogue had already done. His flock did not display the trustfulness, the willing obedience with which they had always responded when he called on them for service. They muttered and scowled.

"Take care, my children—take care!" he warned them, sadly. "Do not raise up a leader who counsels you to do bad things."

"I do not like such talk to be made about me, Father Leclair," said Blais. The priest was on his way to the door. For the first time he noticed another man in the office. It was David Roi, who sat on the edge of a table, clasping his upcocked knees with his hands. He grinned when Father Leclair flashed indignant eyes his way.

"So you dare to come this side of the boundary, David Roi?"

"A man must come to his lawyer, when there is business to be done."

"Then you understand there is such a thing as law, do you? From what I have heard about you of late, I thought you had forgotten."

"You mustn't believe all you hear, father," said Roi, patronizingly. "They all lie about me along the border."

"Listen to me a moment, Father Leclair," broke in the lawyer. "I am a candidate for public office. I have a right to be a candidate."

"You have not yet become the proper sort of a man to lead the people," insisted the priest. "I tell you so to your face. It is my duty to guard my people from all who try to deceive them."

"A priest has no right to meddle in politics. I warn you, father, that you will find trouble if you get in my way.

You are a good man. I hate to threaten you. But I have to protect myself. You talk to my face, eh? Then I'll talk to yours. If you meddle and try to hurt me I shall report you to the bishop."

"I shall continue to do what I think is my duty as a pastor of folks who are easily misled," returned the father. "You are urging them to resist the law, to be violent, to turn out a good man, who has done much for his district. You ask them to elect you, who are untried, inexperienced, and rash. So I shall go on. I am not easily terrified when I am right."

The little priest trudged out of the room and down the stairs.

"That's a gun you'd better spike if you expect to beat old Clifford out for the legislature," suggested Roi. "You and I don't seem to stand very high in our church circles, Louis," he added, flippantly.

He walked to the window and looked down on the men. The priest was going among them, appealing to this one and that.

"I'm not going to allow even Father Leclair to put me out of the running," declared the candidate. "It's my chance—this is, Roi! If I make a big enough row—if I keep 'em stirred up in good shape—I can dump old Clifford out of that chair he's been nailed into all these years."

"Rub their ears! Rub 'em hard," advised the smuggler. "I'll help. There's a slice in it for me if trouble breaks out hot enough along this border. I'll go into this thing with you, Blais, if you'll remember me when it comes time for a whack-up. Later I'll let you know what I want."

"The deal is on," agreed the lawyer.

"Father Leclair is getting a surprise down there," commented Roi. "His sheep are showing their teeth."

"When I get done herding them there'll be other folks

who will be surprised. Now, Dave, back to that business of yours!"

But Roi was not interested in his legal affairs just then. He leaned far out of the window, propping himself by his palms on the sill, and snapped out an oath of astonishment.

An ancient buckboard had creaked to a standstill just beyond the group of men. Fiddler Billedeau stood up and called to the priest, hat in his hand.

Evangeline Beaulieu was on the seat of the buckboard.

"It's Vetal Beaulieu's girl." Roi answered the question the lawyer had put to him. "She ran away like a young fool. I got word that Vetal had started to chase her. I supposed she was safe back home by this time. So he didn't get her!"

"Gad! A beauty!" commented Blais. "You're interested, eh, Roi?"

"She is going to marry me as soon as some of her foolish notions are straightened out," declared the smuggler, spurred to this boast by the lawyer's open admiration of the girl. "Now it's up to me to find out what this performance means."

He hurried down the stairs and went to the buckboard. Father Leclair was there before him.

"Did you know your father has been hunting for you, Evangeline?" Roi asked, breaking on the priest's little speech of greeting.

"I have seen him."

She had shown apprehension when she first saw him. But his insolent tone brought the scarlet of indignation into her cheeks.

"Then why aren't you at home?"

"You know why she is not at home," declared the priest. He spoke low so that the bystanders might not hear,

"And I know why she is not at home. I know all the story."

"There has been enough of this silly business of running about," Roi told her. "I shall take you back to your father, where you belong."

The priest put his hands out to her and smiled. She stood up and stepped down from the buckboard, his hands steadying her.

"Father Leclair, it may be all right for you to meddle with Louis Blais's politics," growled Roi, bending low to speak into the priest's ear. "But stepping between a father and his daughter or between me and my promised wife is dangerous business even for a priest."

The girl was about to speak, but Father Leclair checked her with a glance.

"I have told you that I know it all, my son," he said to Roi. "I know what sort of a husband you would make for this girl, and I know some other things which will not be pleasant for you to listen to. You march on about your business."

"Evangeline must come home with me," insisted Roi. Fury was in countenance and tone.

"Maids are not easily abducted in broad daylight in Attegat parish," observed the priest, quietly. "You may ride back to Beaulieu's house and tell him that his daughter is in safe hands, and that Father Leclair will guard her until her home is a fit place for her."

He led her away up the road toward Madame Ouillette's house, and Roi glared after them until they had turned the corner.

The little scene had attracted scant attention from the men in the highway. They had gathered about Billedeau. He had led them away from the buckboard and was telling them of the happenings in the Rancourt clearing.

Roi tramped back up the stairs to the lawyer's office.

"Look here, Louis, that partnership of ours is going to be a closer deal than I reckoned on. Get busy now and furnish the brains for your end- -for I've got hell a plenty to invest at my end."

X

THE PACT OF THE ORCHARD

FTEN at twilight, when the summer evenings were long, a patriarch trudged down across the fields to Father Leclair's stone house.

This man was tall, and a white beard swept his breast, and he sat under a tree of the orchard with the good priest and smoked his pipe and gazed away into the purple shadows which deepened among the river hills.

This patriarch was Ambrose Clifford, representative of the broad district of Attegat in the State legislature. In all the years he had served his people he had displayed more of the spirit of the missionary than of the politician. He went up to the legislative halls to coax for benefits, because he understood the district's needs. He did not allow the State to forget those half-alien folks to whom all the rest of the country in which they dwelt was "outside." When impatient politicians, from whose hands the public funds were doled, sneered about "Clifford's Canucks," the mild old man did not lose his patience.

"We are making American citizens up there, gentlemen. They are honest; they toil hard; they are willing; but they are poor. They do not ask for charity. They are proud because they can feed their own mouths and cover their own backs. The Acadian is not a loafer or a beggar. They are sturdy men who have gone ahead and

smoothed things with ax and crowbar. They have toiled for their children's sake. They need schools now. They need more roads. If we do not help them we are not awake to the best interests of our State."

Representative Clifford came to the tree in the orchard, his hands behind his back, melancholy on his face.

"I have been out among my good men, Father Leclair. Day after day I have traveled here and there in this district. They do not look up at me in the old frank way. They sulk. They mutter words I cannot catch. But I understand. It's that blatherskite of a Blais. I have said to all that we are making American citizens of our Acadians. I believed that they appreciated what I have been doing for them. And yet here comes one who appeals to race prejudice—tells them nonsense, after shouting that he is a Frenchman, and they forget everything and follow him. It is hard for an old man who has tried so honestly to help them."

Father Leclair hugged his broad hat against his cassock under his interlaced fingers. Representative Clifford was too thoroughly absorbed in his own somber reflections to wonder why the good priest had greeted him so sadly.

"I have been a fool, perhaps. I get only ingratitude after all I have done."

"To be a fool for Christ's sake is commended by God," said the priest. "And Christ understands. To be a fool for the sake of those who do not understand—well, Christ Himself did that—judged from human standards. Ah, I do not boast of my poor little sacrifices. But when I am downcast I comfort myself by some such thought—I spur myself on again, for I shall not be a coward and cease to do good as it comes to my hand to do it."

"I thank you, Father Leclair," said Representative Clifford. "I needed that rebuke."

"It was not meant for rebuke. I have my own sorrow, sir. I have thought of my own people before I have thought of myself. As a man interested in men I say it to you. So I have worked for you and with you. I have been glad that the good State has remembered these people. I have been glad that the big school was built yonder on that hill. I have rebuked those who said it was a Yankee device to win our people from their religion. For I believe that all wisdom is of God, and that the springs of it should neither be diluted by creed nor dammed by creed. Ah, a bold thing is that for a priest to say, Monsieur! But I have despised a prejudice that kept any good thing away from good people who needed help."

"That is right, Father Leclair. You are the most liberal priest I ever knew. You have helped me to help these folks on the border. I don't believe you will ever regret it."

Father Leclair laid his old hat on the grass. His fingers trembled as he drew a letter from his pocket.

"It is from the vicar-general," he explained, emotion in his tones. "It is rebuke from the bishop."

"I have been afraid that something like this would happen," admitted the patriarch, after a silence. "Your bishop is whipping me across your shoulders, father. He means me when he scolds you. But when I opposed grants of State money to sectarian schools I was honest in my belief that the principle was wrong. I believe so now. The bishop is still thinking of his parochial schools. I'm afraid I'm a dangerous friend for you to own, Father Leclair."

"There is a warning in the letter. I must not counsel my people regarding their votes, the letter directs. I

must advise fathers and mothers to take their boys and girls out of the big new school. I am warned that further association with Representative Clifford, who has shown enmity to our religion and has discriminated against our schools, will be considered wilful contumacy and will be punished."

"Yes, I have been expecting all that, father," said the old man, his melancholy deepening. "Spies are busy about us. What we are trying to do has been misconstrued. The bishop does not understand. He is broad-minded. He has developed schools wonderfully. He must have been influenced by lies. I suppose Blais has stirred this latest trouble."

"I chided him before the people—I tore down his rebellious flag. He was leading our good men to the ways of violence. It was right for me to do so."

"But it sounds different when it is reported by an enemy. I have been afraid my association with you would hurt. I am sorry it has brought you this rebuke. I'll keep away, Father Leclair. You are too good a man to be harmed in this way."

He rose and put out his hand.

"No, sit down, Monsieur." The priest pressed him gently back into his chair. "I am a poor parish priest. I recognize the authority of those in the high places. I want to obey the men whom God has placed over me."

He walked a few steps away from the sheltering tree and pointed at the great building on the hill.

"But how can I tell fathers and mothers to take their children away from that school, until our own great men understand our people up here and give our boys and girls what they need?"

Honest tears struggled in the wrinkles of his cheeks. The dusk was down, and the purple shadows had swept

out from the river-valleys across the fields; but the old man who gazed on the priest from his chair could see the tears.

"The soil has been good to our people all through the years," said Father Leclair. "It fed them in old Normandy; it has fed them on this side of the great water. But sad troubles brood over us now, and the soil is not for all the people as it was in the old days. The great school on the hill has brought new hopes and new opportunities, my good friend. There are tools of honest trades there. Wise men teach our boys, and good women instruct our girls. I have seen the boys go away from Acadia in the past; but they carried their own hands only, and the great world swept over them. When the boys shall step out from the new school they will be skilled in handicraft, wise in the ways one must know if he is to get on and go high. Ah, Monsieur, we need such schools here to teach the young how to win their way. Our own great schools are in the cities—not here! Some day my wise superiors will build those schools for us. Up there on the hill a boy learns the language of the nation in which he lives. He learns the trades of that nation. His father bowed his back over the soil and had little. It is my hope for the future of the Acadians that the children may win more from hard toil than the poor fathers obtained.

He came back and stood before the patriarch.

"So I shall obey conscience," he declared; "I shall ask the good God to soften the heart of my bishop."

"That is a noble stand, father," said the old man in the chair. He wagged his head doubtfully. "But it is an almighty bold one."

"I shall write my bishop. I shall tell him all the truth. I shall entreat him. I shall make him understand."

"I met him once down at the legislature—your bishop. I was on the committee of education. He came to ask that State money be given to the parochial schools. Ask? No, he demanded. He said that the people of his Church paid many thousands of dollars in taxes, and that this money goes for Yankee schools. There is some justice in his stand. I'm a fair man. I admit it. But I believe there is another place for religious teachings besides the schools. I told him so. I spoke of our plans for the big school at Attegat. He shook his finger at me and was bitter. I want to advise you as a friend, father; be careful what you write to your bishop. Be careful what stand you take in this matter. There are enemies who may distort."

"I shall demand that he listen to the truth."

"You have been here a great many years, father. Your people need you. It is your home—this house, your barn, your garden. I could never forgive myself if you got into trouble through me. Think well before you start to disobey the bishop."

"But shall I allow a man like Blais to force me to tell the boys and girls to leave the new school? Sooner will I tear out my tongue!"

He came back to his chair and picked up his broad hat. He hugged it against his breast, and the two old men were silent, looking away into the summer night.

Norman Aldrich found them there. He came walking down through the orchard leading his horse. He brought news from the south.

"It's sorrowful business. The officers are putting the squatters out of their homes in the clearings. The owners have been waiting until the summer days are long and warm, the officers tell me. They think that their delay till now is showing consideration for the settlers. But I

do not see any consideration in this business. They are driving the poor people away from the little crops they have put in—the people have nothing but the soil to feed them. The houses along the river are crowded. The men who are responsible for this do not understand the situation up here, Representative Clifford. 'Let them go here—let them go there,' they say. But the Acadians are not nomads. It's like tearing trees up by the roots!"

"I have tried to tell them down there at the legislature, Friend Aldrich. I have begged for money until they have pointed their fingers at me. 'Educate 'em—make something out of 'em besides farmers,' I have pleaded. Education—training in trades—will give the boys courage to start out into the world of the Yankees. That's why I toiled early and late until I got the big school up there. With a little patience we could have worked the thing out. I hoped that the owners of the timber-lands understood. I explained it all as best I could."

"Ah, Monsieur, you could not talk social evolution to the men of a log-cutting syndicate and have them understand," said the priest.

"They understood better what their timber cruisers told them," stated the customs man. "That report showed that every clearing was a menace to standing timber. That's the proper business view to take of it. Up here we see and understand the human side of this thing. The managers of a timber syndicate down there in the city reckon these Acadian squatters in the same class with porcupines. The porcupines damage standing timber—so do the squatters. Off they must go! The timber cruisers recommend it."

"I ought to have understood. I ought to have remembered that dollars are impatient," mourned the patriarch. "Dollars will not pause and reflect that human natures

are not remodeled overnight. The big school — but I realize that the school must go slowly and surely. It will prevail in the end—it will redeem Acadia. But I ought to have foreseen these troubles. I have been moving about my district, Friend Aldrich. The men scowl at me. I know I should have paid more attention to the business side. I am at fault. Dollars will not wait in these days."

"The State ought to intervene," declared Aldrich.

"The landowners are moving strictly within their rights."

"I mean that this great State cannot afford to lose these people as citizens. I have been thinking this matter over, Mr. Clifford. Would it not be possible for the next legislature to pass a special act—buy these lands, open them to settlers, make good the titles of the fifty thousand acres on which men and women have made their homes?"

"I am afraid the lawmakers are too selfish. They have always laughed at me and my 'Canucks.' I would be called a madman if I should ask for what you have suggested. I know legislatures. I have served in many of them."

"Nevertheless, I believe it can be done," cried Aldrich. "I am young and full of folly, you see, Representative Clifford."

"And I am old and also full of folly—I should have foreseen what might happen to these poor people. The men have good reason to scowl at me. I am too old. I will tell them that I will step aside and let a younger man go to the Capitol."

"No, you shall not step aside," insisted Père Leclair.

"I agree with my good friend," said Aldrich, caressing the priest's shoulder. "You must go back to the legis-

lature, Mr. Clifford. You have done much for these folks; you shall do much more. We shall consider this matter of the lands. You shall have help. Do you know Attorney Winton Dole? He was in the last House."

"I do. He is an able young man. And he did not weary his elders with continued declamations on the floor. Yes, an able young man."

"He was my classmate in college. He was with me on the border for a time last winter in the hunting season. I anticipated a part of this land trouble. We discussed special legislation, he and I."

The patriarch rose and put his hand on Aldrich's arm and regarded him with fresh interest.

"I did not know before that you were a college man."

Aldrich smiled.

"I did not feel that it would be a matter of special interest along this border whether I had an A.B. degree or not. In fact, my friends, the smugglers, would show even more prompt contempt for a school man. So I hope you will keep my little secret, you and Father Leclair. I was obliged to work my way through college. I tried to do too much. I came out with nervous prostration and a sheepskin! You understand why I came into the open country of the border. Some day I'll go back to the city and go into Winton's office as a law-student. Pardon me! That's all about myself! I have mentioned it only that you may understand how close Winton and I are. He believes that the State ought to protect and encourage these citizens of the border. You see we have a strong ally, Representative Clifford! For myself, I am in this thing with all my heart. I shall go down before the next legislature and talk to the committees with every argument I can bring to bear. You and I and Winton will

labor together. Let's clasp hands on it, Mr. Clifford. My whole soul is in the thing—for it is right."

"Ah, you two can accomplish much, working together," cried the priest. He patted the clasped hands of his friends. "But if Louis Blais were to replace Representative Clifford! It would be disaster! It would ruin all."

"Truly it would," affirmed Aldrich. "It must all be done sensibly, sanely, carefully. Blais is not sensible. He is not safe. He is not of good repute. He is a fence of smugglers. I have a healthy dislike for that young man. David Roi is his best friend. You are right, good Père Leclair. Attegat must despair if Blais goes to the legislature. The people must be warned—must wake up to the danger."

"It is wonderful to have friends who are young," said the priest, smiling at the officer.

"Yes, it gives an old man new courage," cried the patriarch. "I will go among my people again. I will try hard to show them that there is a way out for us if they will be patient. The big school will win in the end. The State will listen when new voices speak."

"And I shall stand with you, my good friends," declared the priest. "I shall pray that the ones in high places may incline their hearts to me and understand that I am not disobedient. For the ways of the north country are not to be hedged about by narrow creed. I shall put myself where my duty calls me."

They had been talking long. The still night lay about them. Representative Clifford turned to go, and as he turned he cast a glance at the gloomy bulk of the school on the hill—temple of his hopes for the newer generation of the Acadians.

He shouted wordlessly, pointing his quivering finger.

A dull-red glow painted the outline of its lower windows against the night.

"That is fire!" He declared it in the tense tones of one who announces the end of all things. "The big school is on fire!"

The next instant, from one of the glowing windows, tongues of flame came licking. The fire streamed up the side of the building.

Aldrich leaped upon his horse and went clattering away down the village street, shouting alarm. The two old men followed on foot.

The bell of the parish church began to clang.

"Ah, Monsieur, Monsieur! It is sad fate overtaking Attegat," gasped the little priest.

"That isn't fate—it's hellishness!" Clifford roared. "They've let themselves be bamboozled! They've started in to fight the Yankees! They don't know what they are doing. Oh, how can I talk to a legislature about helping 'em after this?"

"It is not the people—it is not the poor people who do this," insisted Father Leclair. "It has been done by those who wish to lead them into trouble. There are men who will profit by trouble on this border. Ah, it is not my poor people who have done this!"

Men, women, and children flocked in the village street ahead of the two old men. The strident clamor of many voices, the mad clangor of the church bell, made bedlam of the night.

The patriarch groaned, peering up at the building as he hurried. Flames were waving crimson bannerets from bursting windows; even to the cornices were the red tongues reaching now. The great building was doomed.

XI

THE FUNERAL PYRE OF ACADIAN HOPES

ORMAN ALDRICH, his horse galloping wildly, was in the vanguard of the rush of persons up the hill. He understood the futility of his haste. The little village had no means with which to cope with a fire of that magnitude. He could only go along with the others and watch the ruin wrought.

Suddenly he swung to the side of the road and checked his horse.

Evangeline Beaulieu stood at Madame Ouillette's gate, her eyes wide with horror, her lips apart, staring at the leaping flames. The baleful light illumined her face and revealed her to him.

"It is wicked!" he cried, running to her, his bridle-rein on his arm. And when he arrived closer, where no one could hear, he tried to comfort her with words of love, for he realized the sorrow this spectacle brought to her.

He tethered his horse in Madame Ouillette's yard, out of the way of those hurrying along the road, for Madame Ouillette came out and gave him permission.

"You shall know, M'ser Officer, that I have been fearing some great trouble for Attegat. I have been warned!" she cried. And he questioned her eagerly and anxiously.

In his own heart he knew that this fire was no accident. The time was ripe for a criminal deed of this sort.

"He has been frowning very much—my Xavier's pic-

ture has told me that much sorrow was on the way," she said, and he turned back to Evangeline, muttering his angry disappointment. He knew from Père Leclair the ingenuous superstition of Madame Ouillette.

"I will lead you nearer," he told the distressed girl. "Will you not come, Madame? We can do nothing except look on. That is poor consolation. But we shall go closer and mourn the loss of the best friend Attegat had."

They joined the men and women who were hastening up the hill.

They were in time to behold a bearded man come rushing out of the main door. Several young men followed him. In their arms they carried a few books, some tools of trades, a map or two, a globe—random articles which had been salvaged in a panic of haste.

The flare of the flames lighted all the landscape around.

The bearded man came staggering to the hillock where Aldrich and his companions had taken their stand, panting words of excited grief.

"It was a set fire, Captain Aldrich. I know it. We have had no fires in the building for weeks. I smelled the oil the moment I ran into the main room. It is outrage. It is dastardly crime."

"It is more than that—worse than that, Master Donham. This is the ruin of our hopes!" Representative Clifford, spent and gasping for breath, had reached the hillock. "They have thrown away the greatest gift our State has given them. They never can expect help or consideration again."

Father Leclair, his face white with his exertions, climbed the hillock slowly.

"This has not been done by my poor people. It is a plot by their enemies. They have been misled—inflamed!

My people have been deceived," he affirmed, with pathetic loyalty.

"But they must shoulder the blame, Father Leclair," said the master. His voice trembled, and his features, lighted by the flames, displayed his grief and passion. "The men of this parish have been muttering and threatening the Yankees. They have been cheering another flag than the flag of their country. They have been encouraging lawlessness. Look at that!" He pointed to the great building, which was now flaming like a torch. "It is setting vicious teeth into the hand stretched out to help."

Aldrich, standing close to Evangeline, pressed palm against palm. He dared not offer more than this covert act of consolation. Tears were on her cheeks. On this blazing pyre her own hopes of honest work and livelihood were being offered up. She felt more utterly homeless than when she had walked out of Monarda clearing. She felt a vague, wistful fear that now her people were homeless, too. She had heard what the men said. She understood how this tragedy would be translated by those who did not know her people as she knew them. The conflagration lighted all the scene for her. She gazed here and there and saw faces of the children. The children were huddled among the elders, and all their faces were sad. The resentment, the suspicion, the passions, the grudges of the grown folks were not in the children. The children understood best of all what the loss of the school meant.

They stood there and mourned the tools with which their hands had wrought, the tools which had opened new vistas of opportunity to them. They mourned the building which had housed them and which had grown dear to them without ceasing to be wonderful; each re-

membered some bit of unfinished work which had been put aside lovingly until the morrow. The children had had so little in their lives until the school opened its doors to all the valley! So their faces were sad; and Evangeline looked down on them and understood.

Once more she felt that mysterious exaltation swelling within her. Bold devotion to these poor people thrilled her. Intuitively she understood them in their candor, their simple-heartedness—kind and generous, but as irresponsible as children. She knew that those in authority would judge them as men and women; the judgment did them injustice.

Aldrich left her with a muttered word. He walked down from the hillock. He went to Louis Blais. The young attorney was threading his way among the people, haranguing them.

"They will taunt us. They will say we have burned their school-house, good men and women of Attegat. Their own guilty consciences will make them say that. They know inside that we had good reason to burn it. But we did not do so. Of course, the good folks of this parish would not break the law. The Yankees will accuse themselves when they accuse us. They know that this school was placed here to break our spirit, to train our boys and girls to be slaves to the Yankees. It is better out of the way. We had nothing to do with removing it. But this fire shows that the luck of the Acadians is turning. Keep on and follow the right leader after this."

He spoke to them in French; but Aldrich understood.

"I do not like that talk, Blais." The attorney whirled and blinked angrily at the man who had dared to interrupt him. "You have been busy here in this parish for

a week or so, stirring trouble. Now see what has happened! Are you trying to ruin these people?"

"I think it is your job to sniff along the trail of smugglers," retorted the lawyer, insolently. "You'd better stick to your job."

"I will attend to that work as an officer, Blais. But I'm talking to you just now as a man. You have been ste'boying on these men and standing back to look on, as you'd watch a dog-fight. You are as much responsible for this dreadful happening as though you had poured the oil and lighted the match," he declared, hotly.

"So now you are accusing my friends and neighbors of being firebugs, are you, you Yankee spy?" demanded the lawyer, with just as much heat. "That is an insult, and I resent it in their name."

The bystanders crowded closer, hemmed in the two, and men muttered resentfully.

Aldrich's nature had no guile in it. He always struck out openly at an adversary. He did not fence. Blais had the Gallic temperament. In that throng, with those listeners, he was more than a match for a Yankee whose chief merit was his straightforwardness.

"You shall be careful what you say of me or of my people, M'ser Customs Spy." Blais advanced with upraised finger. "There are laws to protect a man from slander."

"And there are other laws! There are laws against treason, Blais. There are laws against provoking mob violence. Don't try to fool *me*. You are a knave, and I understand you." It was straight-arm attack, with Anglo-Saxon directness.

Blais, his face convulsed with passion, beat swift tattoo on his breast with his palm.

"I am insulted—slandered for your sakes, my good friends. Listen to him! It has always been so—it will

always be so. The Yankees call us dogs and villains. They spit upon us. All right! But it is to have an end. Look at that, Mister Yankee!" He swept gesture at the roaring mass of flames. "Does that teach you a lesson? Does it show you that it is dangerous to tramp upon the rights of honest men, to kick them out from under your feet, throw them off the lands they have worked so hard to make fit for their homes? Do you think the Acadians will always run like dogs who have been lashed? Ah, no! It is fight the Yankees want. They have shown us that. Very well! The Acadians can fight. You will remember that promise later when the fires go sweeping down through the big woods those Yankee thieves have taken away from poor men who need lands for homes. You look at me. You look at these men. That fire there makes it light so that you can see our faces!" he taunted, brazenly. "You have asked for fight; you shall have it. Go tell that to the Yankee thieves."

The men who stood about yelled frenzied shouts of applause. The excitement of the moment was in their blood. The conflagration shone redly on their flushed faces and fired their spirits. The resentful impulse of the unthinking mob animated them.

Blais rushed to the young officer and snapped derisive fingers under his nose. That was more than youth and righteous indignation could endure. Aldrich caught the attorney's wrist, twitched him off his feet, and, with hand clutched in the collar of his frock-coat, shook Blais as one would shake a refractory dog. When he had finished he tossed the demagogue away contemptuously. Blais fell sprawling under the feet of the men.

Aldrich held up his hand warningly when the mob made a movement toward him.

"Hold on, men! Let's not make this thing worse than it is. You don't know your real friends just now. You will wake up later."

He turned and went back to the hillock, and, though they cursed him and jeered, they did not follow.

"I lost my temper, Father Leclair. I am sorry. But oh, the fools!"

He stood close to the girl and pressed her trembling hand.

"I'm afraid I'm not a good mediator," he murmured. "I seem to stir trouble and make enemies wherever I go. Your father hates me, and now your people hate me."

"It is wicked trouble which has come upon us all," she faltered. "We all seem to be struggling against each other in the dark."

The floors were falling inside the burning building, the beams and sills were crashing, and at last the bell went clanging dully into the white-hot vortex of the ruins.

"I will take you and Madame Ouillette back home," Aldrich told the girl. "It is all over."

The little group—the master of the school, his assistants, the priest, the patriarch—had remained on the hillock. They were the true mourners that night. The children mourned, too. But the men of Attegat held aloof from those on the mound and scowled at them. There was rebelliousness in that mob; but there was awe there, as well—awe and apprehensiveness. The whisper ran from mouth to mouth, "Who did this?" Père Leclair had been among his people, appealing to this one or that, rebuking all. When he had returned to the little group his face was stern, but there was pity in his eyes.

"No, my poor people did not do this," he insisted. "They are stubborn, they are not penitent. I am ashamed. I am sad. But this is not the wicked work of the many—

it is the work of one or a few. However, the people must accept the blame. I am sorry for Attegat."

"Wait!" cried Master Donham. He halted Aldrich, who was leading Evangeline away. "I want to say this to my few friends who are here and to my teachers. We have no fine building any longer. It will be ashes when the sun rises to-morrow. But this school is going on. Of old they taught the young under the trees, in the fields, by the sides of the hedge-rows. It is summer. I will teach under the trees until the rain comes. I will go outside and beg for a tent. I will humble myself and beg for more tools. I will show the State that this school cannot be stopped. There are good men and good women in this State who will come forward and help us when they understand what we are doing for the boys and girls of this border. Take that word about with you—this school cannot be stopped."

Aldrich left Evangeline with Madame Ouillette at the gate of the cottage. The look she gave him when they parted was as dear a caress as an embrace.

"We won't despair," he said. "It is a brave battle-cry, the one Master Donham has sounded. With hope and the trees and a few umbrellas it will be quite a grand school, after all. Did you see the faces of the children light up when the master went among them to tell the news?"

"I have my courage all back. Yes, I have all the old courage and more—because I need more from now on."

He said a soft good night to her and hurried down the hill, leading his horse, for Clifford and the priest had walked on ahead.

"The Maid of Orleans must have had that look on her face when the call came in the old days," he said to himself. There was to come a time when he would declare that belief even more fervently.

XII

THE SACRIFICE OF PÈRE LECLAIR

SO the folks of Attegat parish came to church.

Sagging buckboards rumbled down from the north with the clans of the Cyrs and the Pelletiers. Up from the south rode the Archambeaults, the Heberts, the Daignaults, and all the rest. They came also on foot by families, following the lanes which led to the river road, straggling across the fields. Here and there a rusty top-carriage distinguished some *habitant* farmer; but buckboards brought most of the people.

An average congregation at Père Leclair's church comprised one thousand men, women, and children.

There were many more this day. From distant clearings, where the sheriffs had done their work of eviction, families had come to crowd the little houses of the river-valley. These folks came to church, too. They were eager to assemble with others of the border in conference. There were great matters to be discussed; there were wrongs to be canvassed. The holy day gave opportunity; the church was a convenient rallying-point; the green-sward before it offered suitable arena for a mass-meeting.

Many were there before the dew was off the grass. Hundreds of others came early. Men talked in low tones. They were tense; they were mournful. The poisoned word had gone among them, that was plain.

Had they not been betrayed by those in power? they asked each other. True, this and that had been given to the poor people in the past, but now much, very much —homes and lands—were taken away. They had not been beggars or paupers. They had worked hard. But, after feeding all the mouths and clothing all the backs, there was little money left for building roads and bridges or hiring teachers or erecting schools. So they had taken the money of the State with gratitude. And now the State allowed men to come and drive them away from their homes; and the men said it was according to the law. What good were the roads and the schools and the bridges to men who had no homes?

Ere the sun was high the broad, turfed space before the church was thronged, and the hum of voices was like the angry buzzing from a giant hive.

The men looked into one another's tanned faces, muttering despondently or growling threats. The women murmured their forebodings; and the children listened wistfully.

Was it, after all, a fact that the Acadians were not like the other citizens of the State; that they were serfs instead of free men, that the Yankees considered them aliens in citizenship and children in importance?

Well, there had been a lesson for the Yankees in one affair which had happened. The men who said this pointed furtively to the blackened, fire-scarred chimneys which marked the site where the big school had crowned the hilltop. There were only a few of these men who boasted sullenly in this way. They were rough-looking men. They went about through the throngs, and the burden of their discourse was that it was time for the Acadians to show some of their old-time spirit.

When Attorney Louis Blais came he had with him a

young man who wore gaiters and a corduroy riding-suit. Men who knew said that this was David Roi, the richest of the border smugglers. He came so boldly into Attegat because it was Sunday.

They strolled on the edge of the greensward, arm in arm, with a word now and then for one of the rough and surly men.

They did not enter the church until the others had filed in past the font and had taken their seats in the dim interior. The two lurked in the vestibule until Père Leclair climbed slowly to his pulpit. Then they went in and took seats behind a pillar.

It was still in the church, so still that all the people heard the priest's crucifix tinkle against the reading-desk as he leaned over it to speak to them. His face was pale, and he wore the look of one who was bravely inviting the fate of the martyr. The people did not understand the expression of his face. They did not know of that letter from the bishop. They did not realize that their little father had risen from his knees and walked out to them that day, after a weary night of prayer and vigil before the altar in the sacristy, where he had offered up his own interests as a sacrifice for what he believed was the best good of his parish. He was disobeying the diocesan head. He himself perceived the enormity of such action, viewed from the standpoint of the Church. He could not justify himself before the Church—he could only justify himself before his own conscience. He felt that he understood his own people better than even those high in authority could understand. The bishop had never seen those people. He had never visited Acadia. Father Leclair knew how hard it would be to explain to one who lacked intimate sympathy.

So his face was pale. His wrinkles were deeper. His

voice quavered when he began to speak. He was very weary. They peered up at him and wondered, because he looked so old and ill—he whose face had always been so benign and cheery. He talked to them, as a father to his children, with simple words from the heart.

"Do not be led into error," he entreated them. "Remember that you are citizens of the good State where you live, though the rest of your fellow-citizens are far away over the mountains to the south. They will understand pretty soon. There are good men there—good men make the laws. They will not allow other good men to be persecuted or wronged as soon as they understand. But if you are not good, if you forget yourselves and follow men who counsel riot and rebellion, then the men to the south will not think that you are good men. You will be punished as bad men. Your children will suffer because their fathers have broken the laws. Very soon you will be called on to vote. You must not vote for a man who asks you to forget the country in which you live. You will not vote for Louis Blais, for he advises wrong things. You will vote for a good man who has done much in the past and who will do much good for you in the future. Do not forget faithful service. You can be true to your religion and can remember always that you are Acadians. But let us strive to be of one tongue with our brothers of the south. They gave us the big school in order that our boys and girls might learn much and go out into the world with useful trades—so that they may be just as smart as the Yankee boys and girls. Don't you understand that our brothers to the south have been generous? They are lifting us up—they are not making slaves."

His voice grew firmer. His tones rang through the church. He was then defying all except his own con-

science; he was obeying what he believed to be his duty.

"I counsel you to send your boys and girls to the school where they can best be fitted for the world. The shell of the big school has been destroyed. But the soul of it is still there, my children. Even though there is only God's sky above those who teach and those who learn, the school is still there! I believe our brothers will understand if we are loyal and obedient; and then the school will again arise from its ashes to bless us."

Much more did the good priest say to his people, leaning over the desk, pleading with them, trying to make them raise their sullen eyes to his and survey him in the old frank and responsive way.

And all that which the priest said Louis Blais wrote down with hurrying pencil, shielded by the pillar behind which he sat.

He went away before the benediction, pausing long enough at the church door to order one of the surly men to bring the others to the law-office. Thither he repaired with Roi.

While the smuggler smoked his cigar and lolled luxuriously in the sun, Blais wrought with pen on a sheet of broad, fair, legal paper; and the rough men, who came one by one, stood at the sides of the room waiting.

"Listen," directed the attorney, at last. "You men, listen!"

He read from the paper the priest's words, and they nodded affirmatively as he read. Then, at his command, the men signed the paper, one after the other.

Standing in a row they raised their right hands, and he asked them to make oath that the paper they had signed contained the words of Father Leclair as spoken that day

from the pulpit of Attegat parish. Blais attested the oath as a notary, and the men departed.

Blais affixed the stamp to the envelope with a vicious blow of his fist.

"I hate to fight a priest—but a priest must not get in my way after he has had fair warning," he declared.

"There's no question in your mind, then, about what the bishop will do when he gets that report?" inquired Roi.

"Father Leclair will be snapped out of this parish as quick as the machinery can work. I'm on the inside of the thing. The bishop has already warned him. I saw to it that the bishop had full information about his previous stand on this school matter. It's a touchy point at headquarters since the legislature turned down the appropriations for the parochial schools. Roi, I'm a bad man to tackle. If some other men don't keep out of my way I'll show 'em a few tricks on this border."

He shoved his hands in his trousers pockets and strode about the room, the tails of his frock-coat "winging" behind him. "Damn that Aldrich!" he blurted.

"We seem to agree almighty well in our partnership to date, Louis," observed Roi, malevolently. "And we're certainly doing business together. A school-house and a priest and a customs sneak were between me and the girl I propose to marry. The first two seem to be out of the way to some extent. Get busy in regard to the last one just as soon as you can—and call on me for help."

"A girl!" sneered Blais. "I supposed you had more of a motive in this proposition, Dave. You always have been a little too strong on the girl question."

Roi scowled.

"You want to take into account who the girl is. Let me tell you, Louis, that Evangeline Beaulieu is worth more as a prize than all the picayune political jobs you

can drag down for yourself. Did you ever know what it was to want a girl so much that your heart ached every time you thought of her, and you couldn't sleep for thinking of her and longing for her? Did you ever want a girl so much that when you saw her you felt as though blood was running out of your eyes? If you haven't felt that way, don't talk to me."

"I know better than to lose my head in any such fashion."

"By the gods, if you have never lost your head that way you don't know what living is, you ice-water lawyer! I never have found a girl before that I couldn't have. Now, there isn't another girl in the world I want except this one. And you talk to me of not having enough of a motive! Louis, the motive that puts the spur to me in this thing is the motive that has tipped kingdoms upside down. The rumor has gone up and down this border that Aldrich has cut me out. I'd go out now and hunt him up and drop him if I had a way planned to get me out of the scrape. If you're the right kind of a friend and lawyer you'll tell me a way."

"Don't whip a willing horse, Roi. The thing is moving right if we don't rush it. Give me time."

"But you are giving *him* time. He is courting her. They told me he was at the fire with her."

"Oh, come outdoors and take a walk. I can argue with almost any one except a man in love. You'll get her when the time comes right," said the lawyer, starting for the door.

"I'll get her even if the priest has to be a gun—one barrel for her and one for me," said the love-crazed man. "I'll take her in my arms and make a honeymoon trip to hell. That's the way I feel, Blais. And don't try any of your funny jokes on a man with my disposition."

The buckboards were rolling away. The people were scattering to their homes. They were not shouting to each other as their wont had been in times past. They who rode and they who walked went their ways somberly. No one had helpful or hopeful suggestion for the other. Out of the conference before the church had come doubts, hesitation, more fears. The talk inside the church troubled them instead of convincing them. Their good priest, who had been so wise in their interest in the past, who had helped the poor people to bear their burdens, now faltered advice to them to turn the other cheek, to obey cruel mandates.

Blais, walking by the side of the road, waved his hand to this one and that. He shouted brusque advice that they hold tight, cheer up, remember that Acadians should stand together for Acadians! The men nodded mournful assent. They did not understand very well, but here seemed to be one who was full of courage in their behalf, who did not falter advice to be meek, who was bold and assertive; and they felt that they needed a leader who was bold.

So they nodded to him, and some smiled.

At one place in the street the rough men had collected other men in a good-sized group, and this group cheered Lawyer Blais when he passed.

"The campaign is well under way, and the good Father Leclair will not be here to boom the goat-whiskered Clifford," Blais informed his companion, with satisfaction. "I dropped a letter into the post-office just now as I came past, and if I'm any judge of how things will move, the time-fuse will operate in about three days. And that's plenty far ahead of the legislative convention. Cheer up, Dave! We can team love and politics in a tandem hitch—and so long as we manage to get there

I'll make love the wheel horse for your sake, if you insist on it. There are slicker ways of cutting Aldrich out of this thing than by a club or a gun. You smugglers have too much rough-and-tumble about you. Leave it to me."

Far ahead of them Père Leclair trudged down the dusty road toward the little stone house. He was bowed. His face was care-worn. His worn cassock flapped about his legs, and he was a pathetic figure of a little shepherd of a flock for whom he had sacrificed all—and who did not understand the sacrifice.

XIII

HOW VETAL BEAULIEU MADE HIS WILL

AVE ROI rode down the border to Beaulieu's Place; and a scowl was on his face, and surly resolve was in his heart.

He carried news to Vetal Beaulieu. He told the publican that the big school in Attegat had been burned to the ground. He hinted darkly that this was the first blow in a fight in which the hateful Yankees would learn something of the spirit on the border. He drank deeply of Vetal's white rum, and then he was freer in his disclosures and threats: there were to be some grand happenings in the north, he declared. In Attegat parish would the storm-center be.

"And where is your girl, where is Evangeline, where is my promised wife in all this? She is in with the gang that's against us. You have let her run away and laugh at you."

Vetal met rage with surly protest.

"I did not let her run away. It was to teach her a lesson! You said it would be good to teach her a lesson. You said it when she left. It was the advice of a fool, Dave Roi. I went to bring her back, and I was one man against the whole settlement of Bois-de-Rancourt. Don't you blame me! They took the word of the Yankee customs sneak and the word of the fiddler against me—her father. They drove me away."

"They wouldn't drive you away now," stated the sul-

len smuggler. "They have found out about the Yankees since then. They would stand up for a girl who has deserted her own people and is helping the Yankees to steal our boys and girls."

He went on savagely: "A fine sight it is nowadays to see the girl of Vetal Beaulieu sitting under a tree teaching Acadian girls to be Yankees. They point her out and grin and say: 'That is the daughter of the rich Vetal Beaulieu of Monarda.' Yes, sitting under a tree since the big school has been burned, walking in the fields without a roof over her head, helping the Yankees to keep on in their dirty work."

"If you have seen her there why did you not bring her away, if you are so bold and so proud because she has been promised to you?" asked Beaulieu.

"That's a job for a father to undertake. I have come down here to give you your chance to undertake it," cried Roi. "So come along with me and get your daughter. She must come away. If you go up there and make her come there will be no scandal. I will help you. If you don't come I'll do it alone, Vetal, scandal or no scandal, for I'm going to have her and have her now. I'm going to have her even if I lead fifty men across the line and fight a pitched battle to get her. By the gods, I would have brought her away long ago if it had not been for an old priest—but that old priest will be taken care of mighty soon!"

He strode about the big room, clapping his gloved hands, inciting the gloomy father to action.

He rang changes upon the spectacle presented by the daughter of the rich Vetal Beaulieu, sitting under the open sky, disgracing herself in the eyes of the people by making Yankees out of Acadian children. Vetal had listened with some alarm to Roi's predictions of bitter

trouble in the north. But what made his eyes sparkle at last with determination was this insistent harping on Evangeline's humiliation of herself for the sake of their enemies.

In the end Vetal Beaulieu smote his fists together and roared his intention to assert his authority. From the broad door he shouted orders to his stable to have his horses put to his buckboard.

"Ba gar," he declared. "I went that first time alone with my little horse to find my girl and bring her to her home. For I was ashamed. It was bad if the folks of this border should know she had run away. I was going to be the very kind father to her. Yes, I went alone so that she could not be shamed. But now I shall make the loud noise. I shall not care who knows that Vetal Beaulieu is going to bring home his daughter, no matter how many Yankees stand in the way. She shall come to my house and be an Acadian girl who must obey her father and marry the man to whom she has been promised."

Dave Roi, flushed and swaggering, encouraged this new and noisy determination.

Beaulieu banged the windows down and barred them with the shutters. He double-locked the big door. He thrust the keys deep in his trousers pockets along with jingling coins and crumpled bills. He patted a huge pistol, and hid it on his hip.

When the two sturdy little horses were harnessed he took his place in state on the rear seat of the wagon and ordered his man to drive on to the north country.

Roi cantered ahead. As he rode he wondered how he had allowed a mere girl to defy him so long, to make a fool of him, for he knew that the border people had already begun to gossip about the manner in which Vetal

Beaulieu's girl had thrown over the rich Dave Roi to take up with a mere Yankee who rode the border for the customs service of his country.

But in this new exaltation of resolution Dave Roi did not forget the prudence that those who knew him well called cowardice. He rode north by the route on the Canadian side. He hurried on, but kept looking behind to assure himself that Vetal Beaulieu was at his heels. Those same persons who knew Roi well might have said, had they known of his journey south to secure the services of the father, that Roi was not actuated solely by his desire to avoid a scandal—they would not have allowed this compliment to his sense of the proprieties where a girl was concerned; it would have seemed more probable that he needed Vetal Beaulieu for a task which he did not dare to undertake himself.

They came to Felix Cyr's tavern for the night.

Cyr's is a half-way halting-place for all travelers in that section. It squats flatly on a high, domed hill, and a solitary Lombardy poplar-tree thrusts itself high above the eaves at one corner of the house; the suggestion of the bare poll of the hill, the flat house, and the tree is of a bald head surmounted by a cap with a feather in it.

Many persons loafed in the yard. A man who had eight hounds clustered about his legs argued with Felix Cyr at the door of the house, appealed for admission, and met profane refusal. Felix Cyr had hated all dogs for many years. In the old days, when Felix was a smuggler, he owned a fighting bulldog, and once upon a time he rushed across the boundary to rescue his pet from the jaws of a dog which had come into that section at the heels of a stranger. The stranger was a United States deputy marshal in disguise, and he had a warrant for the arrest of Cyr, and had brought along an able fighting

dog in order to cajole the smuggler upon Yankee territory.

The threat of the man with the hounds that half of them were "yappers" and half were "howlers," and that he would post them near the house and stir them to make a whole night's riot, did not impress Cyr. He kicked one of the dogs and shook his fist in the man's face. But he had a hand-clasp for Vetal Beaulieu and gruff greeting for Roi.

"There are men who are waiting for you," he informed the smuggler. He twitched his shaggy brows to indicate that they were within.

A half-dozen men were loitering in the main room of the tavern. Vetal knew most of them, for he had had abundant opportunity for making acquaintances along the border. One was the hard-faced son of Blaze Condon. One he knew as Zealor Whynot, who made a business of smuggling liquor into prohibition sections, and wore a tin tank fitted to his body under his coat, like a corselet.

"I sent word to a few of the boys to meet us here," Roi informed Beaulieu. "We'll take 'em along north with us. If there's anybody who is interested in making a scrap out of this, my boys will come in handy."

Beaulieu bridled a bit.

"You take my business and run it for me, eh?"

"You have shown that you need a manager—and the girl needs one, too. There isn't going to be any more fooling about this thing."

One person in the room was not of the group of Roi's men. Vetal saw him and seemed to lose interest promptly in the recruits. He strode across and shook his finger under the man's nose.

"Why don't you come when you agree and pay the money, eh?"

The man mumbled a reply, darting furtive side glances of shame at the listeners. He rubbed his palms nervously on his patched knees.

"You may as well talk loud when you tell me another lie about why you do not come and pay," shouted Vetal. "These men, maybe, would like to learn lies about how not to pay."

"I haven't lied; I have told the truth to you. I haven't the money to pay. That's the truth. I have worked hard. The money has come slow."

"Ah, if you swallow a straight nail you will cough it up turned into a corkscrew! No straight truth comes out of you. You have had the last warning. I shall come and take the horses—I shall take the cows."

The man was pricked into rebellion by this attack before them all.

"If you take my horses I cannot earn money to pay you. If you take my cows my children will starve."

"I shall come and take them."

The man leaped to his feet. He had cowered at first, a shrinking debtor before an accusing creditor. His shame became the sudden anger of a weak nature.

"I have already paid you two dollars for every dollar I borrowed. And I still owe you more than you gave me in the first place. I have been a slave to you. I have worked hard. My wife and my children have been without the things they need so that you might have. It is not right."

"You borrowed—you came and begged for the money and agreed to the interest. I did not hunt you up and force the money into your hands."

"I borrowed to send to the big city for a doctor to make my poor wife well when she was dying," declared the man, passionately. He was appealing to them all now—seeking

to justify this debt concerning which he had been so insolently taunted. "It's only what a man would do. He would not fight about interest rates then. He would save his poor wife. I have tried to do right. But the man who takes advantage of suffering and sorrow, that is the man who ought to be ashamed. I have paid you over and over."

"And now propose to whine and sneak out of the rest of the debt, eh?"

"No, but I ask for time. I am a slave to you; but a slave must have time."

"I shall come and take the horses and the cows."

"They are taking the lands away from the settlers across in the Yankee country," cried the debtor. "But that is not so wicked as what you are doing to me—what you have been doing on this border for years. I am going to say it out! You have made yourself rich out of drunkards, and have taken the money which ought to have gone to women and children. But even that is not as bad as piling up more riches by taking advantage of sickness and distress and making a man a slave to you."

"I lend my good money. I have lent money for years to men who come and beg for it. I do not ask them to borrow. And all the men who borrow come back like you and make hard talk to me. I get no thanks. So my good disposition has been spoiled. I get nothing but blame because I have been good to men. If I should give away my good money—toss it out with both hands—I should still be blamed. So I shall make men pay me."

Roi had been listening cynically; the others without special interest. The attitude of Vetal Beaulieu toward his debtors was well understood on the border. And his rates of interest and the numbers of the slaves who paid

tribute to him without hope of extricating themselves were also well known.

The man realized that he had not elicited sympathy from the money-lender or from the bystanders. His fires of revolt soon cooled. He fumbled in his pockets and found a tattered bill or so and some coins.

"It is all I have," he declared, humbly. "I am on my way with my horses to work on the new road through Mellicite forest. My wife and the children have only the milk of the cows until I come home. Then I will pay with my earnings."

"How much do you have there?" asked the lender.

"Two dollars and forty cents."

"And now you owe on the interest almost ten times that! Ah, no! I shall take the horses and the cows. I cannot wait any longer. You do not intend to pay. You have given me hard words before listeners."

His eyes glittered angrily as he spoke, and his mien was unrelenting.

"There are men on this border who will give you something more than words, you man who will take the food from poor children! You will go too far with fathers who see families suffer because your heart is hard. I do not threaten you. I believe in God, and I try to do my duty," cried the man, his voice breaking. "But there are men who will forget God when they see their children starve on account of you. I warn you, Vetal Beaulieu!"

It was passionate prophecy, but the usurer wrinkled his nose and sneered.

There were audible indications outside that the man with the hounds was making good his threat to Cyr. Staccato yelps and mournful howls nearly drowned the quavering accents of the debtor.

"All those who bark at my heels, bah! I think only

as much of them as I do of what is outside there," declared Vetal, snapping his finger scornfully at the window. "I shall take the horses and the cows."

He turned his back on the man, for Roi had thrust an elbow into his side. A new arrival had just come hurrying into the room. This man was distinctly of importance, Vetal Beaulieu decided. He wore a frock-coat and swaggered. He and Roi exchanged looks.

"A room, Felix!" commanded the smuggler. "Quick with you! Bring us something to eat. M'ser Beaulieu and I are tired of standing here where loafers can insult us."

The frock-coated stranger came later to the room to which the landlord had escorted his guests. He was introduced to Vetal.

"He is my closest friend," explained Roi. "He is to be the big man of all Attegat from now on. He is to go to the corps legislative, Vetal. We shall get some new laws and some rights for the Acadians. This is Attorney Louis Blais, and he is not so busy about his own great business but what he can help you and me. So I have sent for him to come here to join us, for it is well to decide on some things before we show ourselves in Attegat."

And then Louis Blais sat down with them and talked much while he ate of the food Felix Cyr sent by the hands of one of the maids.

While they ate, a fiddle was tuned under the window, and soon jolly strains began. By the sound they knew that all the travelers who were housed at Cyr's that night had joined the group about the musician. The twilight was down, and the men in the room up-stairs did not try to see who this fiddler was. They were talking of grave matters.

"It is Fiddler Billedeau," explained the maid, who came to carry away the dishes. "It is very jolly when he happens here."

Vetal's face showed prompt and black anger. He rushed to the window.

"Go—pass on, you thief of young girls! Leave here, you vagabond scoundrel, who go about defying fathers!" he blustered, in the French tongue. In his rage he took no account of what the listeners might think. "I have put my mark on your face once. I will come down there and do it again."

The fiddle ceased. After a moment of silence Billedeau replied:

"Is it you, M'ser Vetal Beaulieu?"

"You know very well who it is—your guilty conscience tells you, loafing pig of a fiddler. Go on your way, and don't disturb gentlemen who have business."

"Here are gentlemen down here who have no business, but who are ready for a little fun," interposed a voice, the voice of one of the guests. "Yes, go on, Billedeau. Go on with your fiddle! As for you above—keep still!"

"I obey my good friends," said the old fiddler, mildly. "When they ask me to play for them it is my duty to play, because my good friends smooth my path through life for me. Bo' soir, M'ser Beaulieu. I shall play."

The fiddle went gaily on.

"Let the fiddler play. Don't make more enemies only for the sake of hearing yourself talk, Vetal," counseled Roi, impatiently. "You have enemies enough. Some one will take a pop at you one of these days!"

Beaulieu came growling back to the table. He drove his fist upon it. He was too angry to think clearly or reason justly.

"They all sneer behind my back, those who do not

borrow, and those who borrow talk hard to my face when I ask them for what belongs to me! And my girl, after I have worked all the years for her, does both—she talks hard to my face and sneers behind my back about the money I have earned. So she is the worst of all." He pointed quivering finger at the floor. "And down there is a man who says that Vetal Beaulieu will soon get something else than hard words! They would like to see me die, eh? Then they all would come and laugh hard over my grave, and my girl would give my money to the priests and the sneaking Yankees! You are a notary, eh? If you have some paper you write, M'ser Blais. Write now."

The lawyer stared, but obeyed Vetal's insistence. He found a blank sheet in his pocket and uncorked his fountain-pen.

"I do not give you the words—I give you the sense. You know the law words. Write it on the paper in the law words that if I die all my money goes to Dave Roi, if he has married my girl; and then my girl will not have any money unless she marries him. Write it that he must marry her within the year after I die, or else he must lose all the money! Ah, that will make you hurry some, eh, Dave Roi? It will make you hurry twice as fast as love will make you hurry, eh?" he shouted, turning convulsed face to the astonished smuggler.

"Seeing that both parties will have such strong inducements to marry," remarked the lawyer, urbanely professional, "the will ought to start the wedding-bells to ringing. But in case of—of an accident—any unforeseen contingency, where will you have the money go then, Beaulieu?"

"To hell!" raved the frantic publican. "If my girl is a fool and Dave Roi is so much of a coward that he

will not get her, I want that money to go where it is the worst place to have money go!"

He stamped around the table as he stamped about his loaded truck in his moments of passion. He jingled the coins in his pockets.

The fiddle outside was singing plaintively. The tune was one of the *chansons* of the old country.

"I'm afraid the bequest must be made a bit more definite," suggested Blais, breaking the silence of the room.

Vetal paused in his march and drove furious gesture at the open window. The fiddle sang on.

"If a fool and a coward lose my money it shall go to some place that is hateful—it shall be wasted—it shall be thrown about the world by a loafer, a vagabond—it shall go to that old idiot who fiddles his way through life—it shall go to Anaxagoras Billedeau. Put his name into the will," he cried, wildly. "If it can't go to the devil himself, let it go to Anaxagoras Billedeau—and I spit on every dollar of it."

He resumed his march, unconsciously keeping time to the fiddle's strains.

The attorney shot a look at the smuggler in which doubt, inquiry, and hesitation were mingled.

"Write it as he wants it," directed Roi, "and make it as strong as you can. It suits me, for I'm going to have the girl. I have stopped fooling where she's concerned."

So the lawyer wrote while the fiddle played outside. In the room the only sounds were the scratching of the hurrying pen and the stertorous breathings of Vetal Beaulieu, his anger boiling within him and seeming to steam through his nostrils.

When the document was finished Roi went out of the room and called to the waiting men below-stairs.

"This is the last will and testament of Vetal Beaulieu," explained the lawyer, when Condon, Whynot, and the others had filed in. "Not that M'ser Beaulieu has any intention of dying right away, but he feels that he ought to prepare his affairs as a business man." He thus answered the astonished queries in their eyes. "You are called up here to sign as witnesses. We may as well have all of you on the paper."

One by one they came to the table and signed, each writing slowly and peering at the document, trying to get a hint as to its provisions. But Roi hurried them, and they obeyed his nod toward the door and went out.

"Now to go back to what we were talking about, Vetal," said the smuggler. "We've agreed, eh, that it's no use to argue with Evangeline? She isn't a girl who can be argued with."

The memory of that night in Monarda clearing came back to Beaulieu. He could see her as she stood before him, her soul dominating him through the windows of those flashing eyes, abasing him, frightening him.

"She is not like the Acadian girls who obey—she talked to me—" He began to wail, but Roi checked him, brusquely.

"I say she is not to be argued with. She wants to have every one else do exactly as she says. She has foolish notions. She lived all her life in a convent, and needs a little practical experience She will settle down after she gets married. So her father and I have decided that she had better get married, Louis."

Roi understood the mercurial temperament of Vetal. The man needed the constant impetus of a stronger will, the support of plausible excuse for action in this difficult matter which had faced him in his family. It was plain that Roi was now talking more for the strengthen-

ing of Vetal's resolve than for the enlightenment of the lawyer. A sympathetic droop of the attorney's eyelid testified his understanding.

"I was perfectly willing to go about this marriage in the usual way—banns, a parade up the center aisle, and all the rest! But no, she stood out against her father and myself and ran away to be foolish along with the Yankees. So her father and I have decided that if it isn't to be a church wedding it shall be a civil affair, and that you shall marry us, Louis. She has been promised to me—her father has come along to see her married, all due and proper, and under those circumstances we'd like to know whose business it will be if we do get married?"

"It is not a good place for any girl where she is now," Blais informed the father. "It is especially bad for an Acadian girl. After she is married and settled nicely with her husband she will be glad that you came to assert your authority. In the end it will come out all right."

"Those who witnessed the will shall witness the wedding," stated Roi, grimly. "And the wedding is set for to-morrow night. I hope there are no fools in Attegat who will forget themselves and fall under the feet of the wedding party."

"They will not laugh at me behind my back after to-morrow night," declaimed Vetal. "I shall show this border that I can run my own family."

From a distance came the lugubrious wailing of hounds. It was low, mournful ululation. To a superstitious mind it carried sinister portent; even the wise have found ominous meaning in that mysterious note in a dog's howl. Blais folded the will, placed it in an envelope, and sealed it. Vetal's hand trembled when he took the document.

"That is not a good sound for a Beaulieu to hear," he muttered. "It means bad things."

"Folks will laugh at you behind your back and to your face, too, if they ever find out that a plain hound dog backed you down," sneered Roi. "What are you going to do with that paper?"

Vetal wrinkled his brow and pondered.

"I think," he said, at last, "I'll give it to Felix Cyr. He has a safe. He shall put it there. I do not like that sound. It is not good to hear. My grandfather told me it is not a good sound for the Beaulieus."

He trudged out of the room with his head down.

XIV

THE TRIALS OF A KNIGHT-ERRANT

ON the slope of the long hill above the Temiscouata portage Norman Aldrich, walking his horse under the fluttering beech-trees—for the afternoon was hot—met a curious procession. A tall, gaunt man stalked along, his head bent gloomily. At his heels in single file trailed seven hounds, who were as gaunt as he, and, with their sagging jowls and their pendulous ears, presented an aspect twice as melancholy. Their tails hung listlessly, and their tongues sweated hot drops upon the dusty highway.

"Dave Roi killed one—there were eight yesterday," stated the gloomy man. He halted when he came up to the officer, and he began without preface. "They were eight of the best hounds that ever snuffed a trail. Four of them yappers—four of them howlers. He killed the best howler because he howled under the window—and he had reason to howl, for Bullhead Cyr wouldn't open his tavern to us. I told them to howl—and Dave Roi killed one. And that will make it bad for Dave Roi some day."

He pulled a man's glove from his coat pocket and shook it above his head. Aldrich had heard stories of this rover of the border, this man of the eight dogs, a harmless nomad whose dementia kept him restlessly on the march through the country-side.

"That is Dave Roi's glove. They can take a scent from that glove and follow it through Gomorrah, across the brimstone fires. Some day he will be sorry because he killed that hound."

He plodded on, and the dogs plodded as dolefully as he. He had begun without preface; he ended without further explanation.

Aldrich stared after the procession with some interest. The name of Roi had added to his interest. But he did not speak to the man. There seemed to be nothing he could say.

He walked his horse on down the slope.

Far ahead of him, where the highway turned abruptly over the opposite hill, he could see the iron post which marked the boundary between the countries.

Another man was marching along the road toward him, leading a saddled horse. This person was alone. When he came opposite, Aldrich whirled his horse sharply into the highway, and, leaning down, rapped the man's breast with the handle of his riding-whip.

The man yelped angrily.

"Ah, you are not rigged up with your tin waistcoat to-day, Mr. Whynot," said the officer. "I scarcely expected you would be wearing it across the line in broad daylight, but I thought I'd make sure."

"I do not do all the things the liars and the sneaks along this border say I do," retorted Whynot, insolently. "You have no right to meddle with a man who is traveling along this road minding his own business."

"I have a right to examine any man—especially a man who makes a business of smuggling."

"Why don't you go where they are really smuggling? Why aren't you up where the Red Lane is open for to-night? Afraid to be there, I suppose. Rather stay down

here where it is all safe—holding up innocent men who are going about their own affairs, eh?"

"You are giving me a tip, are you, Mr. Whynot?" inquired Aldrich, with sarcastic inflection. "I'm much obliged."

"No, it isn't a tip. I'm not telling you where the Red Lane is. But I know it isn't here. Be a coward and stay here, if you want to. It's a perfectly safe place."

"Don't try that talk on me," cried the officer, angrily. "I'm no child. Your boss Roi's wild-goose chases haven't fooled me yet."

"You play the lone-hand game, tumble in by accident, and then tumble out again," sneered Whynot. "Let's see! I believe you were the chap who reviewed a procession of three thousand sheep down Monarda way a few weeks ago! Seeing that you were there on the job you might be able to tell me how much duty you collected on those sheep."

Aldrich got his temper under control. He did not show that the taunt stung him.

"That's an unsettled account, Mr. Whynot. Even the best concern lets some of its bills run awhile. The collection will be attended to in good time. The United States government has a way of getting what belongs to it—including men."

He started his horse along. His cheeks were flushed a bit under the tan. He felt a touch of shame when he realized that he was bandying retorts with this rogue of the border.

"You'd better go north where the real business is on to-night," the man called after him. "This time you are getting it straight. I'm giving you the right tip because I want to see you get into some real trouble. See?"

"Don't be silly, Whynot," replied Aldrich, not turning his head. He spurred and rode out of earshot.

"Well, I can tell Roi that I've got that particular polecat located," muttered Whynot, trudging on through the dust.

He turned after a time and stood watching the officer's progress down the hill. The horse was walking once more.

"After what I've said he'll stay out of the village and watch this road, here, if he watches anywhere," the spy decided. "Roi has him sized all right. The minute he saw me he knew I was doing skirmish duty. Oh yes, he'll stay out."

After arriving at that satisfying conclusion Mr. Whynot hurried on, and at the top of the slope he mounted and cantered away.

Anaxagoras Billedeau, fiddling softly as his old horse plodded, smiled up into the officer's face when Aldrich met him at the foot of the slope.

"I think I'd rather have *my* fiddle than *yours*, Monsieur of the Customs," said Billedeau, by way of a jest. He pointed to the rifle which Aldrich carried across his shoulder. "It's not a merry tune one plays on your kind of a fiddle."

"It's a tune only the wicked will dance to," returned the young man, with a smile. "But let us hope I'll not be called on to play the tune."

The old fiddler regarded him shrewdly.

"It is not to my taste to be an informer, M'ser Aldrich," he said, at last. "I have tried to keep out of the sad wickedness of the border. But I feel to tell you that Dave Roi stopped last night at Felix Cyr's tavern, and there were bad men of his gang with him. I do not know what Dave Roi plans to do. But I never knew him to do any good. So I warn you, M'ser of the Customs. The hawks

flocked last night for some purpose. I warn you because I know of some one whose heart would be broken if any harm comes to you."

"I thank you," said the officer.

"Perhaps I take the liberty!"

"You do not, Monsieur Billedeau. You are a good friend. You have done much to show that friendship. Evangeline loves you. I respect you. Both of us are grateful to you."

"With Dave Roi last night was Vetal Beaulieu—Vetal Beaulieu full of anger and violent words. With the two of them was young Attorney Blais, of Attegat—and they all talked long in a room by themselves. I do not know of what they talked. I did not spy. It may have been of smuggling."

"Yes, it may have been of smuggling," admitted Aldrich, sudden apprehensiveness wrinkling his forehead.

"It may have been of something worse, Monsieur Officer. Perhaps Vetal Beaulieu would not come into the north to smuggle. I have been thinking so as I have ridden along to-day." He put up his hand and ticked off the three stubbed fingers which he extended. "Dave Roi, Vetal Beaulieu, Attorney Blais! I have been thinking much. This morning Roi sent his men away. The men have come across the line by different roads. Ahead of me by this road came Zealor Whynot. It does not look like smuggling. I have not a wise head for plots. I do nothing except fiddle for the poor folks. I am glad I have seen you to tell you of these things. You may understand."

While Billedeau had been talking the young man had been staring at him, perplexity in his face. This news sounded ominous. This conjunction of individuals at Cyr's place, within reaching distance of Attegat, had a

sinister significance which oppressed him more and more as he pondered.

"Where are Beaulieu and Roi?" he asked.

"They were still at Cyr's when I came away. They have horses and a buckboard. Roi's men went, one by one, along the different roads."

The fiddler had delivered the little stock of his information. He picked up the reins. He eyed Aldrich wistfully as though he hoped the officer's superior knowledge of the ways of guile could translate what had been told him.

"I shall set my mind upon what you have said, M'ser Billedeau. It means something—this meeting at Cyr's. We shall find out what it means."

Billedeau hesitated, displaying the reluctance of one who fears that his interest may become presumption. He had heard Evangeline Beaulieu's story of the persecution of her by David Roi; he had heard the passionate declaration of Norman Aldrich's love in the clearing of Bois-de-Rancourt. His understanding of the situation spurred him to speak.

"There is some business Dave Roi and Vetal Beaulieu have together in these days. It is not smuggling. I think you know what that business is, M'ser."

"I understand," acknowledged the young man, bitterly.

"I know the sad things along the border as well as the jolly things. I live among the people in their homes —and I know! I do not tell the stories of the sad things as I ride along, Monsieur of the Customs, for that would be to spread the scandals. This thing, though, I do tell you. Love for a girl can make a young man strong. Hatred of a rival can double his strength. But when he loves the girl and hates the rival, and then knows that the rival is a renegade who is bringing to her shame and

misery, then that young man may fight for her like ten men. So I must tell you what I tell you."

The eyes of the old fiddler blazed under the tufted gray brows.

"Away over in the Codiac settlement there is a girl of the Macpherson family, and Dave Roi took her for his wife by word of mouth before her people. They tell me such marriages have been made in Scotland where the Macphersons lived long ago. I do not know. Dave Roi sneers and says outside that it is no marriage. But poor Bessie Macpherson holds a baby on her knees and thinks she is Dave Roi's wife. I have been in the Macpherson house; I know."

"The dirty dog!" Aldrich gasped. Till now he had not thought of Evangeline as in real danger of contamination at the hands of Roi. He had not believed that the man would dare, or the father would go to positive extremes in the matter of the marriage that had been contemplated. Evangeline had seemed safe there in the north. But these times were not the old times of law-abiding placidity. Even peaceful Attegat—parish of the good Père Leclair—was in tumult. Yet an attempt to coerce a girl into marriage, even though the father favored the union, would be such a rash undertaking that Aldrich had never considered this contingency as possible.

Now his suspicions and his angry fears flamed suddenly. He wondered why he had not realized that Dave Roi had never been accustomed to allow any considerations to stand in the way of the gratification of his passions. In this instance, having the backing of the father, would he show man's honor in regard to the wishes of a maid? Aldrich knew he would not. He cursed his own stupidity in leaving Evangeline unprotected. He was like a man who was suddenly awake.

"I say again, I think it is for no good that Vetal Beaulieu and the man he has picked out for his girl are up here," stated the old fiddler. "What to do I know not. But I have told you the truth, M'ser. I think the strength is in your two arms, after what I have told you."

Yes, and the hot flame of love was in his heart, Aldrich told himself. He had understood her so well from the first, had so clearly seen her instinctive aversion to the swaggering Roi, that the thought of a rival had never disturbed the sweetness of his affection for her. In spite of the distressing *contretemps* at Bois-de-Rancourt, their love had been an idyl. He was sure of her loyalty, even though their circumstances imposed long waiting upon them. The pure and placid romance of the attachment had overshadowed the sordid recalcitrance of Vetal Beaulieu and the sensual wooing by Roi. He had been sure of her heart. Other considerations had not weighed.

Now all was changed! He was convinced that lustful passion threatened her. A satyr's love, sanctioned by her father, pursued her.

The spur of primal instinct roweled Aldrich's soul. The female he had chosen for his mate was in danger of violation. His fears argued with him now: there could be only one errand which would bring Beaulieu and Roi north, despatching their emissaries ahead of them across the border. Beaulieu had determined to take his daughter!

Without stopping to debate the question of paternal rights *versus* the claims of love, Norman Aldrich promptly determined that Beaulieu should not carry her away where she would be exposed to persecutions by the libertine who coveted her.

Back to Attegat, back to Evangeline, if danger threatened—there seemed to lie his duty.

"Thank you—and adieu, M'ser Billedeau," he said, haste in his tones. "I shall act on what you have said!"

He whirled his horse and clattered away up the slope. His plan was not clear in his mind. He really had no definite knowledge that danger threatened the girl. Therefore, circumstances must govern.

Billedeau had warned him that spies had been sent along the highways. Whynot was ahead of him. He decided to be cautious. He turned off the road into the forest, making his way by mossy foot-paths and by bush-bordered lanes which lumbermen had used. The afternoon sun was low, and the shadows were deep under the trees; but he knew the hidden ways through the forest, for he had traveled them at times when caution had counted for more than haste.

Even the impetuosity of a lover must defer to prudence. At sunset he dismounted at a brook and ate his bread and meat while his horse cropped the grass of a little clearing. The ride to Attegat, by the winding paths and devious lanes he had chosen, was no task for a weary and hungry horse.

It was dark in the forest when he swung himself into the saddle. Progress was slow after he started. There were rotting logs across the way, and the woodland vistas were puzzling in the gloom. In the silence of the night the fires of his imagination were alight. All at once the panic of haste took possession of him. He blamed the caution that had inspired him to avoid the spies. To be sure, knowledge of the whereabouts of a man who would seriously threaten their designs would be valuable to Vetal and his companions, and such reflection had caused Aldrich to leave the highway.

While his horse floundered along he tried to console himself by the thought that, lacking information as to

their plans, he needed to employ stealth. The spectacle of him pounding along the highway in broad day on the road to Attegat would have put his foes on their guard. But after a time he was not consoled by that thought. He cursed his folly aloud. Ah, he had gone upon this business of the heart, this knight-errantry for the sake of the girl he loved, just as he would have started on a quest for smugglers! The obsession of his occupation had been too strong. He had employed the methods of a sleuthing customs deputy in an affair where he had the right to stand forth and demand and enforce protection of the girl he loved even from her own father; in his new exaltation he decided that he had this right. For Vetal Beaulieu had promised her to a licentious scoundrel. Without question—and now this conviction came to him with full force—the two were in the north country for the one purpose of carrying her away to settle her future—as Roi's wife. And he was wasting his time dodging trees and wallowing through tote-road sloughs, playing the game of merely trying to outwit an adversary when the occasion needed action, action alone!

It is said that the night brings counsel. In the gloom, as his horse made the best of its way through the woods, thoughts had been racing through the mind of Aldrich. The affair of Evangeline Beaulieu took new form. With force that was telepathic the consciousness came to him that he was wanted in Attegat at that moment!

By following the sinuous course of the lanes he knew that he could arrive there unobserved. But, to repeat, the panic of haste took possession of him all at once.

The highways from across the border came into Attegat like fingers converging to the palm.

Aldrich was between two of those fingers.

He leaped off his horse and took the bridle-rein. The

work he had ahead of him just then was not a horseback job. He would be obliged to desert lanes and paths and plunge straight through the woods to the nearest highway. When he left the route he had chosen he had nothing except sense of direction to guide him. Had it been day he could have found a tote-road or lumber-lane leading out to the highway. In the night, among the trees, the vistas deceive.

He thrashed his way through bushes, across brooks, and the horse followed at the end of the rein. Now and then when the tree-tops thinned he took a fresh look at the north star and rushed on. It was slow work, the best he could make of it. There were battlements of ledges where he was obliged to make detours on account of the horse. Every now and then ravines forced him to retrace his steps. He was headed straight across broken country; and the lanes had followed the lines of least resistance. But he did not dare to turn too far from the direct course, and over and over he risked his neck and the limbs of his horse in making a climb or a descent. In places the crowns of the black growth were so thick that he could not see the sky or find his guide, the north star. Therefore, he lost his way on such occasions.

While he struggled on he damned himself for folly, inefficiency, and lack of all qualities a man ought to have. His hands were bleeding from contact with the sharp rocks; his face was gashed and smarting from thrusts of twigs. An occasional and piteous whinny from the horse informed the officer that the animal was having his own troubles.

The panic which assails one who feels that he is late for the duty which calls him does not aid in accomplishment. Aldrich fell here and there; he rolled, tugging along his much-enduring horse, and when at last he burst

from the forest into the starlit highway, staggering through the wayside alders, bleeding, tattered, panting, he was far from feeling like a hero of any occasion, nor did he resemble one.

He was a disgusted, overwrought young man, blazing with the fury of impatience, hot with the fires of apprehension on behalf of one whom he loved with all his soul and for whom he desperately feared. He did not dare to look at his watch to discover how many valuable hours he had wasted in what he had determined would be a cautious sortie in the woods. He did not take the time to wipe the sweat and blood from his face. He leaped into the saddle and sent his horse away on the jump before he had found his stirrups.

"By the gods, after this when I know I'm right I'll go the straight way to a thing and go on the gallop!" he shouted to the sky above him.

Therefore, out of that travail in the night-shrouded forest came a resolution which was worth the toil, and which served him well in certain other adventures of that stirring evening.

He rode toward Attegat, his face close to the flying mane of his horse, encouraging the animal with pat of the hand and crooning word. He did not look to right or left in search of the spies of Dave Roi. His eyes were ahead, his heart leaping toward Madame Ouillette's cottage in Attegat. That he was too late, that the spies were no longer required, was a thought which seared his soul!

XV

THE SEVEN DOGS OF WAR

THE village of Attegat lay hushed under the stars. The impetuous rush of Aldrich's horse along the street to the square awakened the echoes—nothing else. The folks went to bed early and slept soundly in Attegat.

In the square the officer halted his sweating horse at the mossy trough, and the animal thirstily drove his nose into the water to his eyes. Then there were no other sounds than the eager suffling as the horse drank, the tinkle of the little stream from the wooden spout, the tired murmuring of nestling doves in the eaves here and there. The windows of the houses were blank and dark. In Père Leclair's church the altar light glimmered weakly—the only spark that illumined the darkness.

Aldrich allowed the dripping horse to drink but little, both prudence and impatience governing him.

He rode toward Madame Ouillette's house. Yes, there was one more light in the village. It was in Madame Ouillette's window. He saw it when he turned the corner and began the ascent of the hill. The gate was open. He dismounted and led his horse to the door, and he heard steps hurrying within after he rapped.

It was Madame Ouillette who opened.

"Ah," she cried, blinking sleepily at the night outside,

seeing but dimly, "you have come back, then, Mam'selle Evangeline? I have waited. I have worried."

"Is Mam'selle Evangeline not here?" he gasped. "I am Norman Aldrich. When did she go away? Where is she? Speak quickly, Madame!"

Agonizing fear quivered in his tones. He set his hands on either side of the door and leaned to her, stammering more questions.

"Her father came. Ah, yes, he was her father. She called him that. She went out-of-doors to talk with him. She has not come back. He was her father," she insisted, quieting her own misgivings. "So I did not worry. But I have been wondering why she has not come back."

"My God!" Aldrich groaned. "Why did you allow her to go? Why did you not give alarm? They have stolen her. It is a damnable plot."

"But it was her father," repeated Madame Ouillette. "Who has the right to step between a father and his girl?"

In that tumult of his emotions the woman's remark was like a blow in the face. He groaned. Who had the right? Then he thought of Dave Roi, and that thought was like a blow of the whip across the flanks of a racehorse. He cursed. For him it was no longer a matter between Vetal Beaulieu and his daughter; it was a matter between Roi and a man for whom Evangeline had declared her love.

"Do you know nothing more?"

"No, M'ser. But tell me what—"

He did not wait. She screamed frantic queries after him as he galloped away.

In the middle of the village square a dim figure stood with arms upraised. The gesture was so compelling, so appealing, that he reined down his horse. The man was Notary Pierre Gendreau.

"I heard the horse's hoofs when you hurried past. 'Trouble, trouble,' they seemed to say. I guessed it might be you, M'ser Aldrich. You have found it out for yourself, then?"

"I have found out that Vetal Beaulieu has been here to-night and taken away his daughter," blurted the young man. "Is that what you mean, notary?"

"I do not mean that—I did not know of it. But this is what I know. I am a notary. I have business with the town clerk at Attegat at times. I am entitled to inspect his records. Intentions of marriage between David Roi and Evangeline Beaulieu have been entered on those books. Yes, and the license has been issued. I saw the names there to-day."

Aldrich reeled on his horse. The notary peered up at the face that was ghastly white in the starlight—lined here and there by the blood from the wounds the lashing twigs had dealt.

"It seemed to me like mischief," faltered the old man. "I know Dave Roi. He is not a fit husband for a girl. But I did not think Vetal Beaulieu would do what you have said."

"All of us are fools," declared Aldrich, hotly. "We have let an innocent girl be dragged out of this village. She is in the clutches of the worst renegade on this border. Good God above us! Where have they taken her? What is happening to her?"

He spurred his horse in his frenzy, holding the reins tight, and the animal spun around in a circle on scuffling feet. To right and left and all about Aldrich directed agonized glances as though he were trying to decide which direction to take. His thoughts were piercing him like knife-thrusts. His imagination painted a hideous picture. His were the tortures of a man bound hand

and foot and doomed to witness the ravishment of a maid.

"They can't make her marry him. She hates the wretch. Such things cannot be done," he choked.

"When men are determined and desperate—and a father is present and consents, a great deal can be done," stated the notary, sadly. "I see the hand of Louis Blais in this. He has the right to perform marriages. Yes, a great deal can be done when men are desperate and dishonest."

He was talking to a madman.

Aldrich leaped off his horse and went down on his knees in the dust of the square. He put his face close to the ground. He stared with filming eyes at the criss-crossing of wagon tracks. He realized that such efforts to gain clues were worse than useless. But he was not in a state of mind to use reason. Oh, to find some sign which would show him which way they had taken her! To see one rut fresher than the rest which would afford a hint!

"How did they come? How did they go?" he gasped. "Did you not hear them, notary? Was there not a cry for help? You heard *me!* Why didn't you hear *them?* You must have heard a horse—a wagon—something!"

"No, I heard nothing. Wagons come and go here in the night. I do not notice them. But your horse galloped—you hurried—and I knew the names had been entered on the clerk's books, and I had been worrying."

Aldrich struggled to his feet. He brandished his arm above his head. His lips were rolled away from his teeth.

"Oh, if I were only a hound instead of a man just now! I would follow on my hands and knees. I am good for nothing. I have let them steal her," he raved.

Notary Gendreau folded his arms in the cloak which he had thrown over his night-gear and wagged his head sympathetically. But, having no suggestions to offer, he kept silent.

There were four roads out of Attegat besides the main road to the south.

"No, they would not have gone toward Monarda," the officer burst out, answering certain mental calculations which the notary himself was revolving. "Roi is a coward. He would not take the road on this side of the river. He has gone back toward the border. Oh, God in the heavens, tell me which road he took!"

He lifted his face to the stars. In the stillness there was the sound of tinkling water from the trough near by; the doves still nestled and mourned.

Then came another sound, the sound of plodding feet. Out of the gloom a man emerged. At his heels followed dogs, dim shadows in the night. Aldrich recognized him. This was the terse individual of the seven hounds, and the memory of what he said concerning Dave Roi flashed before Aldrich like a lightning-thrust across black night.

The officer rushed to meet the man. He seized him by the coat lapels. He shook him, and the man fairly barked his alarm as he tried to jerk himself away.

"But listen, man, listen!" pleaded Aldrich, babbling like a lunatic. "This is more than life or death. It is love—it is saving a pure girl from damnation. You have boasted of your dogs. Listen, man! You have said they hate Dave Roi. He has stolen a girl. He is going to—going to—but it isn't marriage! It is ruin for her. It is dirty outrage. This is Notary Pierre Gendreau. He will tell you. I am mad. I know it. But listen, man."

He went on incoherently, but the solemn individual began to listen with interest. Notary Gendreau added

a word now and then. The hounds sat on their haunches, tongues lolling, their eyes shining with red and green fires.

"You said they would follow Dave Roi. Send them after him. Name your price."

"Hold on a minute, mister. If it's for the reason you say, and Dave Roi is the man, there ain't any price to this thing. Did I say they would follow him? Yes, they *will* follow him. Even if he has *flown* away from here instead of walked or rode, those dogs will follow him. What are you going to do to him when you catch him?"

"Send your dogs ahead of me," Aldrich gasped. "What does a man do when he is saving the girl he loves?"

"I see you carry a rifle on your back. If I trust seven of the best dogs in the world to you, can you protect 'em? That's what I want to know. I realize pretty well what you will do for the girl. Will you do just as well for my dogs?"

"As long as I have a cartridge left," declared Aldrich, with passion.

"Let me look at you!" The man took Aldrich by the shoulders and studied his face by the light of the stars. He saw a countenance that was pale, rigid, bitterly determined, and the eyes blazed with fires that made the investigator blink.

"I reckon you mean business, mister," he admitted. "And now that I have met up with a man who really means business and proposes to make Dave Roi 'the business,' I'm ready to do my part. I have been wondering why I kept on walking to-night. But something told me to walk—and I walked. I've found out why."

He released the officer and drew an article from his pocket. It was the glove he had previously shown Al-

drich. He held it above the heads of the attentive dogs, as high as he could stretch his arms, and uttered a peculiar and shrill cry. They replied hollowly and came crowding around him.

"Get on your horse, mister," he advised, "for when they start, they start strong. And remember that yell! A last word." He looked up at Aldrich, who had mounted with alacrity. "I'll be here waiting for you when you bring back my dogs, and remember that you're to bring seven. Remember the yell! They'll follow you back after you give it."

"You will be at my house yonder," stated Notary Gendreau. "I offer you bed and hospitality, M'ser."

The man drove the glove down upon the ground under the noses of the hounds with all the strength of his arms.

"That's the hellion, boys! Get him!"

The hounds bumped their heads together, snuffing eagerly. Then they separated and ran to and fro, their ears lapping the dust of the highway.

"I thought dogs needed the scent where a foot has trodden," suggested Notary Gendreau. "Roi must have ridden away."

"Those dogs don't," returned the owner, curtly. "Not in the case of a man who went into the pack and hammered one of 'em dead. You've got a lot to learn about dogs, sir, and you can learn more from my dogs than you can from any others in the world."

One of the hounds uttered a tremulous wail.

"They're off," cried the owner. "It's up to you, officer. They're my boys; take care of 'em!"

Aldrich did not reply. His thoughts were too busy. Fortune had shuffled and dealt him a strange hand on a sudden. The flying hounds were streaming ahead of him

down the village street. He set his teeth and followed at a gallop.

Once or twice, in the main street of the village, the dogs slowed and shuttled from side to side of the highway, as though in momentary doubt or because they desired to reassure themselves. Then they sped on. Below Père Leclair's stone house a narrow road led off to the north. The hounds ran tumultuously past the end of this road, yelped a shrill chorus of disappointment, and turned in a pack with such haste that they sprawled and skated in the dust. They swept into the branch road.

After that there was no hesitation. They ran furiously, and at their heels came Aldrich at the full stride of his horse. Out of the welter of his emotions rose then the happy consciousness that he had a horse who would not fail him in this crisis. He had tested the animal on many occasions. Aldrich understood by the nervous spring of the shoulders between his knees that this horse had forgotten the trials of the early evening in this new lark behind the hounds. The dogs were serving as pace-makers. Even a weary horse is stimulated by the spirit of a race.

But it settled into a long race. The narrow road was winding, and led them by devious ways. They coursed hills where the warm breath of the summer night fanned Aldrich's burning cheeks; then they swept down and into hollows where the air was moist and damp with the eery chills of marshes and watercourses, and where white veils of the mist drifted over the alders. The dogs ran in silence. Aldrich kept his eyes on the flapping ears and the waving tails, and in his breast there began to glow a strange sense of affection and gratitude toward these zealous and unflagging guides.

He was a man and they were dogs, but the same spirit of vengeance animated all of them!

He did not ponder coolly as he rode. His thoughts were white-hot, and through them played one red flame: the devilish conviction that Roi, sanctioned and abetted by the father, would set no bounds to his lustful desperation in making this girl his own. The affair might be mockery of marriage; but, nevertheless, it would be effectual in enslaving Evangeline Beaulieu. He knew the border; its loose code of action, its callous indifference, its habit of accepting what had been accomplished as being right and proper. And in the matters of women, the independence of girls, the border sentiment harked back to the old days, the sentiment of which Vetal Beaulieu had expressed when he declared: "I say to my wife 'go,' and she go—that is the way of the women of Acadia!"

So he rode with fury of haste and despair. He took no thought of what he would do when he arrived. He pondered no longer upon the question of his rights in the matter of Vetal Beaulieu's daughter. He considered not the miles or the direction. Whether he had crossed the border or not, whether he was in the States or in Canada, he did not care. He was no longer an officer of the customs; he was a man seeking the girl he loved. He flung away his cap with the badge which made him respect the covenants of nations as to metes and bounds. That badge had halted him once when all his heart reached out for her, when he had been obliged by his official duty and his oath to respect that painted line on the floor of Beaulieu's Place—to halt there as though it were a wall reaching to the heavens.

He felt savage satisfaction when he hurled the cap from him. The act seemed like symbolizing his bursting of all the trammels of those hampering considerations which bind men to this and to that. The red blood of achieve-

ment streamed in his veins. He was the male seeking the mate who had been ravished from him.

One man against numbers? His desperation made no account of that!

"Hold up!" It was a hoarse hail from the gloom ahead of him. But the next moment he was past the man, whoever he was. The hounds had not hesitated. A fusillade of revolver-shots chattered behind. But Aldrich minded the popping of protest not at all, and the bullets yipped harmlessly past him.

It was evident that Roi had posted a picket. Aldrich swung his rifle from his shoulder into his hand. A picket hinted that the scene of action was near at last.

Suddenly the hounds gave tongue. At the foot of the hill down which they were rushing was a house which was signaled by a light in an uncurtained window. A pale glow from an open door illuminated the yard, which sloped from the road. Aldrich had time to note a buckboard with horses attached, and there were several horses picketed near the fence. He saw this in a flash, as the camera sees. The reins were loose on his horse's neck, and he was riding at the heels of the hounds at top speed.

The hounds gave tongue more vociferously! They announced that the quarry had been run to earth!

The bedlam of their voices was terrifying; it had broken out so suddenly in the night's silences! It was unexpected, deafening, weird clamor. The howls and yelps made a din that would have struck dismay to the heart of a company of grenadiers.

The dogs headed straight for the open door and leaped through it headlong, tumbling over each other. The horses of the buckboard sagged back on their halters, broke them, and ran. Aldrich escaped being carried down in that rush only by swerving his horse, and at the same

time he leaped to the ground. He had seen a man on the door-stoop as he came up. This man darted to one side when the dogs rushed past him. It was evident that this charge of hounds had been too terrifying for his nerves. But Aldrich, leaping at their heels, was a man, and the outpost took courage and came at him with an oath. The light revealed his identity to the officer. It was Zealor Whynot. The officer was running. With the whole force of his body behind his fist he struck Whynot as he hurdled the stoop, and the man crumpled and rolled off the steps to the ground.

This first engagement was so summary that Aldrich did not lose his stride. He was down the hall and into the rear room of the house just as the first of the pack of frantic hounds hurled themselves against Roi.

Again that camera flash of vision for Aldrich—the agony of his anxiety imprinting that scene on his soul forever!

His first wild stare was for Evangeline.

He and his dogs had burst in there so suddenly that he had given the actors in the drama no time to leave their poses.

Vetal Beaulieu was holding his daughter's wrists. Even the tempestuous arrival of the hounds, this irruption of strange disturbers, had not availed wholly to alter the expression of her face—the expression with which she had confronted her persecutors before he came.

This was no despairing, surrendering, fainting maid on whom he gazed.

One look at her, and he understood!

She had been battling. It had been a fight against odds. She was one against them all and helpless. Of the end of the single combat there could have been no doubt. Louis Blais was standing there, the marriage

license in his hand, the words ready upon his tongue. Vetal Beaulieu, glowering, determined—his pride, his money, his peace of mind at stake—clutched her wrists and had sworn that she should marry the man to whom he had promised her. In the end she must have been overwhelmed, but when Norman Aldrich burst into that room she was battling with all the fierce resolution, the strength of soul, the stubborn ardor of her Acadian forebears. Upon her cheeks flamed the battle-flag her undaunted soul had set there. Her eyes, when they met his, were filled with the fires of bitter resolve.

Into the one word "Evangeline!" he put all the love, the joy, the encouragement, the hope that human voice can compass, and her love-lit eyes and her thrilling word in return rewarded him, gave him the fierce valor that makes no account of odds. All in that one instant he saw and comprehended.

The hounds were battering themselves against Roi. They did not rend and tear. That is not the nature of hounds with men. They leaped singly, in twos, and in threes. In that small room the roar of their howls beat upon the ears with distracting violence. Sound alone would have been sufficiently terrifying. But it was plain that the smuggler expected that they were leaping at him to set their teeth in his flesh. He was screaming in mad fright.

He curved his arms before his face. He kicked wildly. But the dogs yelled and leaped and drove themselves against him, pounding him against the wall, spattering his convulsed face with froth and spume from their slavering jaws.

Blais endured the astounding scene for a moment and then sprang over the swirling mass of dogs and dashed out a window with his foot.

"They're mad!" he screamed.

There were several other men in the room, and they followed Blais when he threw himself out of the window. Others yelled the frantic warning that the dogs were mad. That fear routed Roi's supporters more effectually than clubs and rifles would have done. The mortal terror of men who were menaced by hideous peril drove them.

"You are cowards—you are all cowards!" vociferated Vetal, his own fears giving him the sudden, fictitious courage which weak men show when they are at bay. He released his daughter's wrists. Aldrich had leaped in their direction.

Roi could not escape. The dogs kept battering him against the wall.

"You have no right," shrieked Vetal; but the furious young lover was in no mood to argue over again with Vetal Beaulieu that matter of rights.

"To my horse! Quick! To my horse!" Aldrich thrust the girl on her way even as he spoke. "I'll follow."

The next moment, using his rifle as he would handle a batstick, he struck the lantern and sent it whirling from a table through the open window. In the sudden, black darkness the howling of the dogs was more awful, more stupefying. The noise in those close quarters fairly made the brain reel.

The flabby publican clutched the officer in the darkness.

"Here he is, Dave! I have him! Kill him!"

Time was precious. Only seconds had elapsed. The surprise had been complete and effective. The conspirators were in confusion for the moment. Aldrich realized that he must not delay then, even for the sake of satisfying his very natural inclination to square his score with David Roi. But when Roi came dashing for-

ward, at last, fending off the dogs, striving to reach the door, Aldrich, though the gloom was like a pall, sensed the proximity of his hated foe. He threw Vetal off, and the next moment felt that sweet satisfaction which goes back to those primitive days when the mind of man was not acute enough to win its comfort from mere moral victories; he felt his naked fist against the flesh of the scoundrel who had tried to steal a woman, and he heard the scoundrel's body go down in a corner of the room; and then he decided that his business in that locality did not require any more of his personal attention.

His duty lay outside that room!

His arms ached to hold her, to lift her to his breast. He wanted to make sure of her. After the agony of his fears for her safety, only the assurance that she was held against his breast would satisfy him. Such was the impulse that sent him racing back into the night outside.

The man beside the stoop was rolling and moaning. He was surely out of the fight; but above the din of the dogs Aldrich could hear the voice of Blais in the rear of the house, rallying those who had escaped with him through the window.

The lover realized that a convent-bred girl, even though she were a girl of the border, must lack the experience as a horsewoman that would be needed in that crisis.

She was waiting for him beside his panting horse. The poor brute had performed his full task for that night. Among the three horses picketed in the yard his quick eye singled the sturdy horse which Roi rode up and down the border. He ran and flung himself upon the animal and leaned and loosed the others. They had been rearing and neighing in fright ever since the advent of the hounds. They did not need the kicks and yells he gave them. They bolted,

and on their heels he swung his new mount and caught up the girl. She clung to him, and, as he started away, he imitated the shrill call with which the gaunt man had apostrophized the hounds. He had given their owner his man's pledge. He did not forget the dogs! His own horse was cantering beside him, whickering plaintive assurance of loyalty.

"My darling!" he gasped. "Hold tight! We're safe." But at that moment he felt the thud of a bullet against flesh and bone of the horse between his knees. The crack of a rifle came to his ears an instant later. Some one had fired from the house. In spite of his desperate effort to save the fall, he and his burden rolled upon the turf of the yard when the horse went down. But that whicker of loyal pledge had meant something. When Aldrich came to his feet his own horse had halted. The girl was on her knees now. His temples cracking with the effort, he tossed her into the saddle.

Once more he unslung his rifle. That bullet had declared their code of conflict.

"Go on! Hurry on!" he commanded the girl. "Cling to his mane. For God's sake hold tight! Go on!"

Then he began to fire.

He did not take aim. He clutched his rifle and pumped the lever, cursing them, threatening them. He did not know whether they fired again. He could not hear. The hounds went racing past, and he turned and ran after them. When he overtook the horse, he grasped the saddle and forced the animal into a trot by slaps and adjurations. He did not dare to task the horse by mounting. The palpitating flanks under his palm showed that the brute was laboring. But no man on foot could overtake them, for Aldrich, clinging to the saddle, was dragged along at a nimble pace. When he could run no longer, when his

heart seemed bursting and his eyes were dim and his throat was constricted as though an iron band were set about it, he drew the loose rein.

Then he realized that a sound he had been hearing was Evangeline's voice. She was imploring, protesting, beseeching.

"I will not ride longer, Norman. My lover, my sweetheart, I will not ride. You are suffering. I am strong. I will run beside you."

But when she struggled and desired to slide from the saddle he prevented her. He had taken her hands in his own, and now he walked beside the horse, holding them, pressing them, trying to tell her his joy and his love in that fashion, for he had yet no breath for words.

The tumult at the foot of the hill either had called in the picket or had sent him scurrying away in flight. He did not molest the little party which was making its retreat from the battle-field.

At last Aldrich pulled his horse to a standstill. He listened. There was no sound behind them. The panting of the hounds at his feet, the rustling of the night breeze in the trees above their heads, faint shrilling of insects in the wayside grasses—there was no more ominous sound than these.

He babbled to her incoherently as he marched on, and she answered through sobs of thankful happiness.

Now and then he hurried the horse and ran until fatigue mastered him, for he feared mischief might come suddenly from that silence behind them.

So they went on through the night, back toward Attegat.

When the horse walked, Evangeline caressed her lover's face with trembling palm, and dared once to lean and kiss his forehead. And once he stopped the horse and pulled her down upon his breast and put into an embrace all

"MY DARLING!" HE GASPED. "HOLD TIGHT! WE'RE SAFE!"

the passionate longing of his love and all the delirious thanksgiving of his soul.

"Oh, my father! My father!" she mourned, at last. "I went out to him with love in my heart, Norman, for he told me that he had come to be my good father—he asked me to go with him to Père Leclair's, where he could confess his sins and make his pledge. Oh, Holy Mother, have pity on a poor girl whose father has become her worst enemy!"

She told him the pitiful story of how she had been carried away, her father's hand smothering her cries as they rode out of Attegat.

Aldrich soothed her as best he could; but in that stress of grief he realized that words availed little. But in telling her of his love he was more eloquent. He forgot his weariness as he plodded on. Her hands were in his, and, when he drew her down to him, her lips pressed him with the ardor of a love which had been hallowed by the gratitude of a woman saved from worse than death by him that night.

So, although the first faint streaks of the dawn were in the skies when they came to the village of Attegat, he trod on briskly, for love animated him, the warmth of it flooded his breast and nerved his limbs.

He eased her from the tired horse and rapped upon the door of Père Leclair's stone house.

"They will not find you here, dearest. They will not dare to disturb you here. To-morrow we shall take counsel and make you safe."

"Who is below?" asked the voice of the good priest, his face at the window of the tiny gable.

"A poor little girl who seeks sanctuary, father. It is Evangeline Beaulieu. She has been in sad trouble. It will all be told to you."

Until the priest came to open the door Aldrich stood with the girl folded in his arms, looking into the eyes she raised to his, her face lighted by the first rays of the gray dawn. And when they heard shuffling slippers in the hall and Father Leclair's anxious hail to his old housekeeper, she put her arms around her lover's neck, drew his face to hers, and kissed him with lingering tenderness.

"I have said no words of thanks to you, my precious knight, my lord," she said. "I'll not profane a great deed with words. I'll live a life of thanks to you, of devotion. For I love you!" Her tones thrilled.

"Darling, a pearl of great price does not need to thank the man who is happy enough to possess it, if that man follows a thief who has stolen his pearl," he answered.

Then he gave her into the care of the good father, releasing her hands tenderly and regretfully.

"It shall be told to you to-morrow, Père Leclair. It is a bad story about wicked men."

He kissed the closed door after she had gone.

He paced to and fro before the stone house until the light in the chamber where the old housekeeper had led her had been snuffed out. The patient horse waited, his weary head hanging in slumber. The dogs sat in a circle, eyeing this new master wistfully.

They followed at his heels when he trudged away down the village street. All was still about Notary Gendreau's house. But the tavern-keeper of Attegat was astir, for one must be early at work around a tavern.

"Take those dogs to the stable along with the horse," directed Aldrich, to whom the landlord had bowed respectfully and cordially, recognizing a regular guest. "And look, Lajeunesse! Give them right now the best meal a dog ever ate. Dip deep in your ice-chest. When

the market is open go across and buy seven of the best bones in the shop."

He gazed into their upraised eyes affectionately.

"I'm sorry that man's generosity can't do more for a dog!"

He went along the line of hounds and patted each on the head.

"Good boys!" he declared, and his voice broke with weariness and thankfulness. He added, tenderly, not minding the landlord's curious scrutiny, "If I wasn't so dead tired I'd stay up and make an after-dinner speech to you."

"There's blood on your face—and by the looks there might have been some in your eye, awhile back this night," observed Napoleon Lajeunesse. "You have catch some pretty bad smugglers, hey? You take the dogs to 'em, eh?"

"Yes," smiled Aldrich, as he turned to enter the tavern. "They were trying to run something more precious than rubies across the border."

XVI

THE TRAIL OF VETAL BEAULIEU

ALDRICH rode to the edge of Father Leclair's garden-plot, and the priest left his beets and came tiptoeing across the crumbly earth.

"Is she still asleep, Father Leclair?"

"Yes, my son. Mother Bissette has been crawling about the house all morning as carefully as a caterpillar on a vine. You see, even I tiptoe across the ground outside as I tiptoed indoors. Sleep will do much for her. Ah, my son, she is a brave girl! She has a heroine's spirit."

"You should have seen her when I found her, good father! All the rest of the horrible business of last night is pretty much nightmare. I came out of it as one wakes up from a bad dream. It has steadied me, remembering how she behaved."

The priest glanced furtively at a curtained window in the stone house.

"It was all very brave. It was like a page from a romance. She told me, and there was a wonderful light in her eyes when she talked of what you did, but I think you saw it there yourself, my son, before you parted from her. Yes, it was all very brave, but it is very serious. There were shots. It was battle, eh?"

"I had no other way out of it. I fired to keep them back. I fired high—at random."

The priest was regarding the officer with earnestness and some curiosity. Aldrich wore a riding-suit of gray tweed, and a felt hat had replaced his badged cap.

"I have been into my trunk at the tavern, Father Leclair. I am riding on my own business for a time."

He glanced in his turn at the window where the curtain was drawn.

"I do not think they will disturb her again, but—"

"She shall stay with Mother Bissette until there is less riot—less recklessness on this border," declared the priest, with decision. "Daytimes she will be safe with her scholars up there under the trees. Nights she shall be under the roof of the stone house. They will not attempt—they will not dare!"

Aldrich threw up his arm and clinched his fist slowly.

"I have grabbed upon a thistle—I am going to crush it, Father Leclair. That is why I am riding on my own business. I am going to clear this matter up, now that I have started in on it."

Père Leclair peered up at him uneasily from under the brim of his broad hat.

"Only good-fortune—a lucky accident—the hounds of a half-witted vagrant—gave me my chance to save Evangeline last night. I don't propose to have her tortured every hour of the day by anxiety—her nights full of fear. For myself, I don't intend to skulk. So I'm going to hunt up Vetal Beaulieu and make him understand that I have an honest man's right to love his daughter. The thing must be settled, Father Leclair."

The priest shook his head. "You have a young man's impatience; as an old man I fear it will lead you into trouble, my son."

"And yet," insisted Aldrich, "to leave this thing hanging as it is is intolerable. There can be no comfort for

poor Evangeline nor peace of mind for me until I have seen Vetal Beaulieu. No, Père Leclair, I do not know what I'm going to say to him," he cried, replying to a look in the priest's eyes. "But after what happened last night I'm certain that my love for Evangeline will give me a tongue, at least; it has already given me courage and strength, good father. I may be imprudent in what I am going to do. But yesterday I came near wrecking my life and hers, too, by being too prudent. I swore that after this I would go straight to a thing and gallop hard. So I'm going to Vetal Beaulieu. These are not the sort of days when a man can persecute his own daughter and help a renegade to ruin her. Tell her, Father Leclair, that I have gone to her father for the sake of both of us. I'm going to make him understand

As though he feared that the priest might try to dissuade him, he slapped his horse and rode away, his eyes caressing the curtained window until he had turned the corner of the house.

Aldrich displayed no hesitation when he came to the narrow road which led to the north. He sent his horse cantering along its shady stretches. The sun was overhead, and his rifle was at his back, and determination was in his heart. His face was haggard, for he had slept but little. Impatience had driven him early from his bed at the tavern. He felt that it was his duty to roll the burden of fear from the girl's heart. He sought Vetal Beaulieu at the place where he had seen him last, resolved to follow along his trail until he could meet him face to face, under the frank sunshine, for a man's talk.

Suddenly he met Attorney Louis Blais on the narrow road. That participant in the affair of the evening before was riding a horse whose galled shoulders showed that it was more accustomed to the plow than the saddle.

Blais was sullen and uneasy when Aldrich halted him. He had not recognized the officer until they were almost side by side.

"Which way did Vetal Beaulieu go this morning, Mr. Blais?" inquired Aldrich, curtly and with the authority of one who intends to be answered.

"I haven't any information for you about Mr. Beaulieu or any one else," returned the surly lawyer. To cover other emotions he assumed an air and a tone of unnatural dignity. He talked like one reciting from a text-book.

"You will remember that I found you playing a strong part in a vile plot last night, sir. You'd better be civil. There is a bar association in this county, and decent lawyers won't stand for abduction."

"Look here! I was invited to perform a civil marriage. The license had been procured. The only surviving parent of the young lady was there to give her away. The affair was interrupted by a person who had not the least right to interfere. If that person now proposes to make talk about the thing he'll show almighty poor judgment. How will that talk sound? He ought to realize that he has just as much reason to keep still as the aggrieved and injured parties." Blais delivered this angrily.

"I have important business with Beaulieu. I say, you'd better tell me which way he went."

"Not desiring to be a party to the assassination of Mr. Beaulieu by a person who seems to have motive and the intention," stated the attorney, with stiff insolence, going as far as he dared with this young man of the haggard face and the burning eyes, "I shall keep my mouth closed." His lips worked, however, and it was plain that he wanted to curse this hateful adversary with all the

venom that was in him; he refrained with the usual caution of Louis Blais when he found himself up against odds. He curbed his anger and confined himself to stilted retort, as though he were addressing a court.

Aldrich had placed his horse across the narrow road.

"Why are you holding me up here?" demanded Blais. "Have you added highway robbery to the rest of your desperate deeds?"

The officer snapped scornful rejoinder and rode on, resisting an impulse to slap Attorney Blais's sour face.

After a time Aldrich came to the house where the dramatic scene of the night before had been enacted. There was no sign of life there. The doors were open, the windows were bare of curtains, and much of the glass was broken. The appearance of the place showed that the house had been deserted for years. In the daylight he saw that the clearing had grown up to bushes. This was the lonesome place which had been chosen for the wedding of Evangeline Beaulieu! He rode close to the door and peered in. Only dust and decay and silence!

He went on pondering.

Blais had given him a hint that they who had been witnesses and actors in the affair did not intend to talk. Aldrich had not expected that they would. He understood, however, that the "stand-off" had created a situation which, as he had told the priest, was intolerable. Also, as he had informed the priest, he was not sure what he would say to Vetal Beaulieu. He understood the prejudices of the man to their depths. But there was the story of Bessie Macpherson! He should demand of Beaulieu that the story be investigated. And he had decided that if Vetal Beaulieu did not take a father's proper attitude after that in this matter of the protection of a good daughter, he would know what to say in behalf of the love

of Norman Aldrich for Evangeline Beaulieu. Thus he pondered as he rode on, determined to hunt up Vetal Beaulieu for a talk, man to man.

He drew one comforting inference from the return of Attorney Blais to Attegat, unaccompanied. The band of conspirators had broken up. It was plain that they had no heart for further violent measures at that time. That Blais would serve them as a spy and adviser, that Roi was still determined to prevail—of those facts Aldrich was assured by his apprehensions. This was not truce; it was sullen delay. He felt that he had all the more reason for insisting on an interview with Vetal Beaulieu. He must impress on that obstinate parent that this was not a case of compelling a girl to obey a father's promise and command; it was wilful wrecking of innocence and happiness. As he reflected on the matter, as he remembered what the fiddler had told him, he could not believe that Vetal Beaulieu would persist in his determination in regard to the unspeakable Roi. Vetal Beaulieu, in spite of his grudges, his temper, his jealous ignorance, was Evangeline's father! The thought that he was such, and must have real affection for her under all his turbulent emotions, encouraged Aldrich as he journeyed and pondered. The man must listen to him! Sense and reason and regard for decency must prevail when a man is a father!

At last he came out of the narrow lane and was on the broad Canadian highway.

Here and there, now at a forge, now of some wayside toiler, he asked for news of Vetal Beaulieu. He got no information. If Vetal had gone toward the south by the broad highway he had passed in the night or had passed unobserved. But the men whom he asked eyed him with curiosity and gossiped after he had passed on.

Was not this one of the customs men without his uniform? What was Vetal Beaulieu of Monarda doing in the north country, and why was an officer on his trail?

Aldrich explored side-roads. He asked questions with assiduity; the apprehension that he was leaving Beaulieu behind, that the father was between him and the girl for whose sake he had taken the road, disquieted him. He searched with care. He wanted to feel sure that Beaulieu was ahead.

But he got no information until he arrived at Cyr's tavern.

Aldrich had ridden widely, had searched deviously. The twilight shrouded the big hill when he came at last to Cyr's tavern. That had been the rendezvous! He looked eagerly at the wayfarers who were smoking in the big room. Beaulieu was not there. Roi was not in sight. To be sure, he had scarcely expected that Roi and Vetal would hurry back to this place; but they had met there to plot—they might be there to wait for further opportunity.

Felix Cyr—Bullhead Cyr—shaggy and lowering, sat behind the little counter under which he kept his stock of liquors.

Aldrich had given his weary horse into the hands of the stable boy.

Cyr scowled, recognizing a foe when Aldrich crossed the room.

"It is late, but may I have supper, sir?"

"Maybe you can go and hunt up a maid and coax her to unlock the cupboard if you have money and a glib tongue," stated the landlord, brusquely.

The officer leaned over the counter and put an inquiry in a low tone.

Cyr bellowed a reply which took all in the room into his confidence.

"No, M'ser Vetal Beaulieu of Monarda is not at my house this night." It was insulting disregard of a guest's desire to keep his affairs from the ears of others.

"Do you know whether he has gone toward home?" asked Aldrich, keeping his temper down and his voice low. "I know he has been at your house within a day or so."

"You will tell me what business you have with my friend Vetal Beaulieu before I tell you where he has gone," declared Cyr. "You do not wear that cap with the old hen of the United States on it this time, but I know you. Why do you chase my good friend down the border?" He shouted this retort, looking at the men in the room with an air which suggested that Felix Cyr desired to show that he would never demean himself by holding secret conference with a customs man.

Aldrich straightened.

"I do not go around exposing the private business of M'ser Beaulieu and myself to all listeners, sir. I asked you a square question as politely as I could. I'd like a straight answer."

"My friend Vetal Beaulieu has gone away from here and is very busy minding his own business. It is a good plan. It pays me; maybe you can make it pay you."

Aldrich turned away from the counter. His nerves were not in the best condition. The preceding hours of the night and the day had been too full of tribulation. He was afraid that if he remained longer at the counter, looking at Cyr, he would leap over it and cuff that puffy, scowling face.

"I don't know as there's any great secret about Vetal Beaulieu," remarked one of the men in the room, a bearded giant who sat on the end of the "deacon seat" near the

grimy wall of the room. "I met him a dozen miles or so below here to-day when I was driving up."

"I thank you," said the officer. "Can you tell me whether he was on his way home to Monarda?"

"I reckon your friend Beaulieu was headed for the hive," returned the bearded man, with a sneer in his laugh. "He had collected his honey. He was leading three horses behind his buckboard, and a half-dozen cows were ahead of him. On the buckboard he had hens and shotes in crates. I get it from the people along the way that Friend Beaulieu had been realizing on his bills of sale," he went on, for the benefit of his listeners. "He came down on folks who owed him, and he was in a state of mind where there was no arguing with him. If a man couldn't pay, he took what there was in sight—even down to the children's pet bantams. If a man who owed him didn't have collateral in sight, Vetal left word that he would send an officer with an execution running against the body. He certainly was in a fine condition to do collecting without fear or favor. I'm glad I wasn't owing him anything. I would have had to walk. He would have had my team away from me."

Aldrich believed he understood what had provoked Vetal Beaulieu's rage against humanity in general. Helpless victims had been atoning vicariously because Vetal Beaulieu could not expend the frenzy of his fury on the man who had stirred all the gall of his unstable temperament.

"I don't know what the nature of your business with him may be," continued the informant, ironically. "I believe I just heard you drop a gentle hint that no one had better ask you. But if it is anything that can wait, you'd better wait. You tackle him now and you'll have to talk business between punches."

Aldrich went away thoughtfully to hunt up a maid who could be bribed to furnish him with food. He was not encouraged by the report the bearded man had given him.

He mounted his horse in the early morning, conscious that Felix Cyr was surveying him with suspicion and curiosity from under his shaggy brows. The sturdy landlord stood straddled on his porch, jingling the coins which Aldrich had just tossed into his palm.

"So you go to chase Vetal Beaulieu, eh?"

"I'll return your courtesy of last evening, sir. I am busy minding my own business. It is a good plan. Perhaps it will pay you to do so."

He was fully aware that Cyr shouted strong language after him; but he was not tempted to make retort. He was saving his man's spirit for Beaulieu, for after what he had learned he understood that he needed it all. He rode on resolutely, nevertheless.

After a time he came upon the trail of the vengeful creditor. That trail was twenty-four hours old, but it was still hot; men whom he asked concerning Vetal Beaulieu cursed volubly and pointed to the south. Yes, he had gone that way! He had taken away the only cow; and the children had cried themselves to sleep last night. He had led away the horse, and how could the grass be mowed or the fields of potatoes be cleared of weeds? Yes, and how could the family go to church on Sunday? That man who would not listen to excuses or promises or prayers, he had taken bread from their mouths and the comforts of their religion from their souls. Complaints and threats and dolorous despair dinned Aldrich's ears as often as he ventured to ask if Vetal Beaulieu had passed that way. And he was coming back for the bodies of those men who could not pay!

Ah, surely the devil himself had suddenly taken the form of Beaulieu of Monarda and had set out to persecute the poor people! Aldrich listened and rode south, his hopes waning, but his determination growing bitterly strong.

The repetition of this grief and rage proved unendurable at last. The young man was sure that Vetal was headed for Monarda with his spoil. He had had a day's start, and even though he would journey slowly, leading his horses and driving his cows, he must be near home, so Aldrich decided. He gave his horse loose rein and asked no more questions. He took the shortest route to Monarda clearing.

But it was late in the day when he arrived there. He had been forced to linger here and there by the wayside gates to hear men curse and women lament.

The windows of Beaulieu's Place were shuttered and barred. The big door was padlocked.

A cripple, a misshapen man with crooked legs and shoulders hunched to his ears, hobbled from the barn, a pitchfork in his hands.

"No, he is not at home yet," said the man, in the peevish tones of the dwarf, when Aldrich asked a question. "I cannot sell you drink. I have no key to the house. I live in the barn."

He hopped in out of sight with the celerity of a trapdoor spider and slammed the tie-up door behind him.

The young man allowed his horse to crop the short grass of the yard and sat down to wait. There was a bench just outside the door.

Thrushes lilted their twilight songs in the trees near by; there were bird-calls in the deep woods that sounded like the tinkle of silver bells. The horse reaped his mouthfuls of grass with mellow rendings of the tender stalks

and stamped away the flies. All these sounds only accentuated the peaceful hush.

But it seemed to Aldrich that there was something ominous in the silence of this place which was usually so noisy. Waiting outside the door of a friend's house when it is empty gives one a wistful sense of gloom; the vacant shell of an enemy's castle is more portentous. And the young man was straining his ears to catch the sound of Vetal Beaulieu's buckboard wheels. He had hoped to meet up with Beaulieu in the open—out among men where the presence of others would impress constraint upon both, compelling them to speak quietly so that others might not hear, to act with discretion so that onlookers might not quote. The thought occurred to Aldrich that this meeting on Beaulieu's own ground might be a collision rather than a conference. He questioned his prudence in forcing such a *contretemps*. Then he took fresh hold on his determination, thought upon the woeful plight of Evangeline, beset by her fears of further violence, and settled himself down on the bench to wait.

The padlock showed that Vetal was not within. A little spider furnished further proof. He had spun in the corner of the door and was crouched in the center of his web.

The night drew on. The stars winked above the spruces, and the chill from Hagas swamp came creeping across the clearing.

Aldrich realized that he was hungry. He strode to the barn and rapped upon the tie-up door.

"I do not sell drink," snarled the dwarf from within. "I have no key."

"All I want is milk," declared the young man. "I will give you a half-dollar for a tinful with a bit of your bread."

After a time the man shoved the bread and milk through

the half-opened door, snatched his coin, and slammed the portal savagely.

When the officer had eaten the frugal meal he smoked his pipe and trudged up and down in front of the door, his thoughts busy with the protests, the arguments, and appeals he would employ with Evangeline's father. The reflection that Roi might accompany Vetal did not intimidate Aldrich in his new spirit. His rifle was on his back, his soul was in arms, and he had demonstrated that he proposed to fight them according to their own code.

Furthermore, that they would go as far as actual violence when he faced them in a situation where the presence of the girl did not complicate matters, he did not credit. That other attack on him at Beaulieu's Place had been fomented by desperation, and the agent was a drink-crazed man. It had been an attack from ambush, and such deeds were rare on the border. If Roi came, so much the better! He would charge the scoundrel with his betrayal of Bessie Macpherson, and would challenge him to a denial in the presence of Vetal Beaulieu. So he tramped to and fro and pulled savagely at his pipe and waited. Now and then there was the sound of wheels on the road. But they who appeared did not stop. Even the straggling customers of the place seemed to know that the doors were shut and that Beaulieu was away.

At the corner of the house he studied his watch by the light of the stars. Nearly ten o'clock.

While he pondered with watch in his hand he heard the husky lowing of cattle down the road to the east. His man must be approaching. He waited in the shadows of the low building.

Cows came first. They dragged themselves wearily and complained with deep-throated mutterings. There was only one man on the loaded buckboard. Horses

jostled behind it at the length of halter-ropes. Aldrich mounted and rode forth to meet the wagon.

It was not Vetal Beaulieu, this driver. He was a young fellow, and he stuttered, and his tones quavered when he replied to the officer's sharp questioning.

He admitted that he was Beaulieu's man after he had incoherently denied that he was. He owned up that he was bringing Beaulieu's buckboard home, and that the cows were Beaulieu's and the horses were Beaulieu's; but this information was wrung from him piecemeal.

"Look here, my man," said Aldrich, suspecting that he understood what this reticence signified, "I am not trying to prove a smuggling case against you."

"But you are an officer. I know you. You do not wear your cap, but I know you."

"I am attending to my personal business now. I am not on duty. I want to find your master."

"I don't know where he is."

"But where did you leave him? Why did you come on alone?"

"He was tired. He stayed to rest. He will come to-morrow—yes, I think he will come to-morrow."

But where Vetal Beaulieu had stayed, what house harbored him that night, urgent questioning did not elicit. The man was dogged, confused, indefinite. In vain did the officer protest that his business with Beaulieu was honest, had nothing to do with the customs, concerned a matter in which Vetal was interested. The fellow stammered evasions and became querulously angry when Aldrich tried to pin him down. To only one declaration did he stick stubbornly: Vetal Beaulieu would not come to Monarda clearing that night.

So Aldrich, muttering some uncomplimentary remarks, touched his horse with the spurs and gave vent to his

impatience by galloping away. The ominous stillness of that deserted house had got onto his nerves.

He rode back toward the east, along the road by which the man had arrived. He rode aimlessly, hoping that he would fall upon some information which would lead him to the man he wanted. His desire to meet Beaulieu and settle the matters between them had been whetted by delays; circumstances and difficulties had not moderated his determination.

At least, he pondered, he could seek shelter somewhere along the road, and he could return to Monarda in the morning.

For some miles the forest hemmed the highway. There were no clearings and no houses. Farther on, he passed through a little settlement, but the houses were small and mean and promised only wretched lodgings. He had come to Monarda by one road from the north; he decided to try another thoroughfare, for it was plain that he had missed Beaulieu's trail when he had given over asking questions.

The forest skirted this road, also, and he went on slowly, favoring his horse.

The moon, pared to gibbous three-fourths, rose at last. He put his horse to the trot. It seemed silly quest, this search for Vetal Beaulieu in the middle of the night, when undoubtedly Vetal was snoring in some farm-house; he decided to hurry on and seek lodging at the first house that seemed respectable.

The moonlight makes odd shadows in a woodland road.

He stared ahead of him at one turn and was not certain that he had seen living objects. He peered more closely and was sure that the objects moved. They passed into the woods at one side of the highway, and the glimpse he secured convinced him that he had seen

two men on horseback. If they were men they had retired from the road at sight of him.

The shifty young man at Monarda had not satisfied Aldrich in regard to Beaulieu's movements. Men had passed the place while he had waited for the return of the publican. Perhaps in some manner Beaulieu had learned that an unwelcome caller was waiting before the barred door. It would be like Beaulieu to shirk an interview, the nature of which he suspected. If those were horsemen yonder they had displayed stealth. They were not the usual belated wayfarers of the country-side proceeding on legitimate business. These reflections and others hurried through the mind of the anixous officer. Beaulieu at Monarda, with open doors and surrounded by his friends, might not be an easy man to approach for such an interview as Aldrich required of him. If that were Beaulieu coming on horseback, he had believed that the return of the buckboard would send away a disappointed suitor. Yes, that would be like Beaulieu, the officer decided. That mode of procedure suited the pattern of the man. Aldrich dauntlessly proposed to himself to proceed on the supposition that this midnight skulker was Beaulieu. That was a good place to meet a man on the matter for which he had come—out under the stars, face to face in the open; that was the place for man's talk! He would be Vetal Beaulieu, the father, there, instead of Vetal Beaulieu, the usurer, the smuggler, the landlord of Beaulieu's Place!

Aldrich halted his horse.

"Ho, M'ser Beaulieu!" he shouted. "If that is you, sir, I have business with you!"

He listened while his voice echoed among the trees. He got no answer.

"It is important, sir. I have things to tell you."

He waited a few moments and then rode on. He had certainly seen men on horseback! He kept on until he came to the place where he had seen them turn from the road. The moonlight showed the fresh tracks of horses' hoofs. There was no lane by which they could have made a detour. They must be near at hand. In his eagerness to fulfil his mission Aldrich did not pause to weigh consequences.

"M'ser Beaulieu! I have come in friendly spirit! I tell you freely who I am. I am Norman Aldrich."

The men were near at hand. While he waited for a reply he heard the whicker of a horse.

"If I have made a mistake—if this is not M'ser Beaulieu, please tell me so, gentlemen. I will go on about my business."

Staring into the gloom under the trees he saw the quick spurting of sparks before the sounds reached him; then a revolver cracked spitefully, emptying its six chambers. It was such unprovoked, cowardly reply to his courteous pleadings that he could not muster voice to cry protest. No bullets reached him. It was probable that they were wasted in the trunks of the trees between him and the man who had fired. But the brutal, wanton intent of the unknown behind that revolver was plain. Such despicable ambush stirs the meekest to fury. His horse began to leap in panic, and Aldrich swung his rifle from his back.

He fired once, twice, thrice, and when his horse whirled and galloped on toward the north he let him run.

The senselessness of this encounter made him all the more furious. It was of a piece with the affair of the night before—blind battle in the dark. At least, these unknown miscreants had known at whom they were firing; he did not have that advantage. He felt a sort

of grim satisfaction when he reflected that he had retorted in the same language they had employed. Matters were arriving at a pretty pass on the border when bullets took the place of words! It was borne in on Aldrich that he had come upon times and men of a sort the old days in Acadia had not known. He had been trusting too much in tradition; he had not believed that assassins were abroad in the land which had been so placid. He decided that discretion must supplement valor after that, even when a man's heart is hot and his love is spurring him.

When he had ridden a few miles, a pale light in a farmhouse signaled to him. He found a mother keeping vigil beside a sick child; and she permitted him to stable his horse, and she opened the door of the fore-room to him.

He went to sleep wondering whether Vetal Beaulieu had been there among those trees and had attempted that summary way of eliminating a prospective son-in-law.

But how that chance encounter, that random interchange of shots, would color his troubled affairs some day he did not dream nor apprehend.

XVII

THE BITTER WORD FOR ATTEGAT

ORNING — fresh, sparkling, sun-bright morning—brings new counsel and burnishes courage if courage has been tarnished by the shadows of the night before. Evangeline's lover arose and returned to Monarda!

But when Aldrich came to the clearing in the late forenoon, the padlock still dangled outside the door, the little spider had increased the size of his web, and it was clear that Beaulieu had not come home.

The cripple snarled through a crack in the tie-up door and corroborated what the padlock and the spider's web suggested. The sullen young man had gone away, so the cripple stated.

Aldrich sat down on the bench and waited. Men straggled past and eyed him with some curiosity. Of those who came from the east he inquired whether they had any news of Vetal Beaulieu. No, they had no news. They merely wished that Beaulieu would come back and open up his place so that a thirsty man would not find the Monarda road so long and dusty.

There were few passers-by. In the summer days of growing things men were in the fields. Even the men who traveled the Red Lane for profit found better employment when the mowers were needed and the crops were ripening.

Duty called to Aldrich; he had spent much time on his own affairs. Disgust at this tedious waiting overmastered desire to have it out with Beaulieu.

In the early afternoon he growled and shook his fist, in his indignation, at the barred door, and swung himself into the saddle. He rode first to the west and then took the long highway north to the great river. He journeyed toward his post, and decided that he would soon seek another opportunity to impress upon Vetal Beaulieu the necessity of revising certain plans regarding the wedding of Evangeline.

On the long road folks are not supercilious or reserved or afraid to warm up to those whom they meet. Acadians politely doff hats to all strangers and smile; men hold up and chat and exchange confidences and pass on and never see each other again.

Therefore, when Aldrich overtook a carriage that was slowly dragging up a hill he spoke courteously to the passenger therein. The passenger was a priest. He answered rather gingerly, staring at the stranger. One could understand that he lacked experience in the free and easy ways of New Acadia. Aldrich returned his stare, and saw that the priest had a straight mouth with narrow lips, narrow eyes, and above these a straight, unbroken line of eyebrows. His broad face was crossed by these three horizontal lines, and between the lines one could read stubborn will and autocratic obstinacy.

It was unmistakably the face of an Irishman; and Aldrich wondered what an Irish priest could have for business in that land of the *habitants*.

"You are not a Frenchman, then," declared the priest, showing fresh interest after Aldrich had greeted him.

"I am one of the customs deputies of this district; my name is Aldrich."

"I'm glad to know you, sir, seeing that I am carrying no contraband." The priest allowed the straight lines to curve for a moment. "I am Father Horrigan. I am on my way to the parish of Attegat. I have been transferred there."

He stated this with complacency, without visible indication that he supposed the news would cause any astonishment.

Aldrich gasped an ejaculation. He knew that Father Leclair had determined to brave the bishop in the matter of the school; but that this breach of discipline would entail anything except a rebuke the officer had not dreamed. Father Leclair was an institution in Attegat. He was attached to his people as an oak is attached to its soil, as a hill is attached to the granite which supports it. Who could conceive of the parish of Attegat without Père Leclair—father of his people, pastor of his flock—living in the little stone house, taking the tithes at the big door of the barn, slying out the doles to the poor folks who came humbly and thankfully to the little rear door?

"Do you know anything about the parish of Attegat?" asked the priest. He eyed Aldrich's manifest consternation with considerable curiosity.

"I do, father. But this is hardly credible—I mean, I am confounded! You are transferred to Attegat?"

The priest bowed his head stiffly. He did not relish this outburst.

"And the present incumbent is ordered to go to Moosehorn plantation—to the mission," he said, the lines of his lips straighter.

"But that is into the wilderness—in the backwoods—the lumber camps," faltered the officer.

"I believe so. The mission is very remote. But it is to be made a matter of discipline," stated the priest,

dryly. "I see that you stare at me, my son. Well, the offense which has been committed by the incumbent is very serious. He has defied diocesan commands. He has persisted in that defiance."

He had spoken harshly; but now he allowed the straight line to curve once more.

"It is believed that the parish needs discipline as well as the priest who has rebelled against authority. Therefore I have been sent up here. I have enemies who declare that I am successful in matters of discipline—the unfounded charge of enemies, my son!"

After this flicker of irony the hard lines came back into his face, though he smiled grimly.

"So that is why a man by the name of Horrigan has been sent north to Attegat," he said.

This man among the children of the parish of Attegat! They were all children, even those whose hair was white and whose limbs were feeble. This man replacing Père Leclair, who had petted their foibles, indulged their whims, helped them to nurse their griefs, and had made himself a child along with them! Aldrich was aware that the expression of his face must be informing Father Horrigan that this news was the news of disaster.

"It may not be as bad as all that," remarked the priest, his keen perception translating the officer's thoughts. "I see that you are a friend of the incumbent," he added.

"Does Father Leclair know that he is to be taken away from his parish?" Aldrich asked.

"A letter from the vicar-general has gone ahead of me," stated Father Horrigan.

"Then it is settled—it is over; he has no chance for appeal—to explain?" stammered the young man, his emotion visible.

"*Res judicata*, my son! Meaning that the case of one

who has defied his superiors has been acted on. It is settled."

He resumed the study of his little book of offices.

They were at the top of the hill, and Aldrich urged his horse on at a canter. This news had shocked him. His grief was deepened by his sense of utter helplessness. He understood through what difficult avenues must appeal proceed. And yet, more than all, he realized what a calamity to Attegat would the loss of Father Leclair prove in this crisis of affairs when the overwrought people needed to be coaxed back to order and peace and loyalty; when the wise prudence of the good priest would prevail in the end. Of that outcome of Père Leclair's intercession Aldrich was sure in his own mind. What might happen when the militant Father Horrigan arrived on the scene and began his programme of autocratic discipline Aldrich did not dare to guess. But he foresaw tumult, worse rebellion.

He determined to reach Attegat ahead of the new priest.

When night came on he found lodging at one of the little taverns on the river road, and was on his way north again at dawn.

He hastened eagerly.

In the afternoon he galloped into the yard of the stone house, knotted the reins about the tethering-rail, and walked to the door with the aspect and the woe of a mourner who walks to the portal of a tomb.

Evangeline opened the door and came out and waited for him under the vines of the little porch.

"You have heard! Your face tells me you have heard," she told him, sorrow in her upraised eyes.

"The new priest is on the way. I overtook him yesterday on the long road. If his heart is as hard as his face

—and he seemed proud to boast that he understood matters of discipline—then Attegat is going to have a master who will lay on the lash. Where is the good man?" he asked, solicitously.

She nodded toward the door of the little study across the narrow hall. They had entered the house. She could not control her voice to reply. Tears were on her cheeks.

He drew her to him and stroked her hair.

"One moment, sweetheart, for a word about our own troubles. You know the errand I went on! But I could not find your father. I hunted for him diligently. I went as far as Monarda. I shall go again. Keep up good courage. You will be watched over at Madame Ouillette's after this, and I shall find your father and make him understand."

There was time for no more then, for Père Leclair opened the door of his study.

"What shall I say to you? What can I say to you, good Father Leclair?" asked Aldrich, sorrowfully.

He had expected to find the little father of Attegat broken in spirit, sunk in woe, overwhelmed by this disaster.

Père Leclair smiled!

His face was as pale as his hair was white, and weary lines were under his eyes; but he smiled, and his voice was firm when he greeted the young man.

He supported a row of books upon one of his arms.

"Come in, my son," he invited. "I am packing my box. I have plenty of time for a talk with you. There is one comfort in being a poor priest; one little box holds all, and the work is soon done."

"But you must not leave us—something must be done—they do not understand!" blazed Aldrich, passionately.

"I wrote to the good bishop—a long letter, as I told you I should write. Yes, it seems he did not understand."

Aldrich found Representative Clifford striding to and fro in the study.

"This is damnable outrage, Aldrich," he stormed. "I have seen trouble coming, but I didn't dream it would go as far as this. Understand? Of course they don't understand. They are taking the heart out of a body, the brain away from a soul, and expect the body to live! That's what it means when they take Father Leclair out of this parish! The people here haven't realized what he has meant to them. They have been growling and muttering; but they haven't realized that Father Leclair is a part of them, part of their souls and bodies! They'll wake up. But they'll wake up too late."

Père Leclair tucked the books into the box.

"Perhaps my way with them has not been the good way, after all," he said, mildly. "I thought it was the right way; and we have been happy here. But now at the end too much trouble comes to my people. I am not wise as the great men in my Church are wise. I will not presume to advise them. I have done something which is not right, so my people have turned against me."

"It's no such thing," declaimed the patriarch. "Other men have made the trouble. The people are not awake. They have been fooled. They don't know what's good for 'em. They have bitten the hand of their best friend."

"But, Father Leclair, tell me! Have you given up hope? Are you going to let them put you away in this fashion? Aren't you going to protest?" demanded Aldrich.

"Here's your home! Here's everything you have worked for," added Clifford. His wrath made him care-

less of his words. "You have given everything to these people. You haven't got even a decent suit of clothes to wear away. That's all right so long as you stay here where your home is; but it's all wrong to throw you out. You aren't going, Father Leclair! You can't go!"

The priest smiled again, wistfully but bravely.

"It is not for me to say, my good friend. I am an old man, and going away from here is hard. But I must go. I could disobey my superiors when it was a matter between the good God, my conscience, and myself. That matter could be appealed from human judgment in prayer to God Himself. I did that, Friend Clifford. I knelt the long night through before I preached my sermon. I was called upon for sacrifice! Perhaps my life had been laid in too easy places. Perhaps I owe penance. It is better to sacrifice ease and position than to sacrifice conviction of the right when the future of my own people was concerned. I stood for the school."

His face grew radiant.

"I honestly believe that the humble immolation of myself upon this altar will work in the hearts of my people —will bring good to them in the end out of all this evil which is upon us now. The school will do its work all in good time. I will go away, as I am commanded, and I will go without hatred in my heart and without gloom on my face."

He stretched his palms to them, appeal in his gesture and his eyes.

"I ask you to help me in these dark days. Do not try to arouse hate and obstinacy in me. Say to me, 'It must all be for the best, Père Leclair. Good will come out of the sacrifice. Though you are old and are taken away from those whom you love, yet it must be that God has something else for a grand task, and intends to prolong

your life and make you useful.' Say such things to me, Messieurs. Give me heart and courage, for I need such words."

He gave to each a hand, and they clasped the thin fingers and stammered, abashed by his smile of resignation.

"Aldrich, I want to see you a minute or so," blurted the patriarch, after a moment of troubled silence. "We'll get out from under the feet of Father Leclair."

He took the officer by the arm and dragged him out of the house so hurriedly that Aldrich had time only for a mournful nod when he passed Evangeline on the porch.

They walked along the edge of Father Leclair's little garden toward the orchard. The old hound sat in the shade thrown by the great barn, looking wistfully at the house, as though he had been told by his canine instinct that something was wrong. The trim luxuriance of the neatly tended garden conveyed unutterable pathos to Aldrich; he knew that every seed there had been sown by the hand of the good priest, that every plant had been the object of his solicitous toil.

"Look a-here, Aldrich, it mustn't happen—it can't happen! I'm the last man to meddle in church matters—but this isn't a church matter when you get down to bottom facts. It's a damnable, dirty plot, and the Church is being used in the thing as a weapon and doesn't realize it. By the gods, they have got to reckon with me in this thing—I'm in it!"

"I repeat," agreed the officer, sadly, "that the bishop doesn't understand the situation up here in this parish. You and I do understand how unjust it all is. It isn't religion; it's politics! You know more about politics than I do, Representative Clifford. What can be done?"

"Fight!" declared the doughty old man. His politi-

cian's soul now descried a tangible object of attack, a definite course to pursue. "You are right, my boy. This is not religion. A saint has been martyred because his superiors have been lied to. The bishop has never understood these people up here—he doesn't know what kind of a school ours proposed to be. All there is to it, he must be made to understand. He must be shown what kind of folks these are up here. They need a father instead of a master! They're all children! Père Leclair is as much of a child as the rest of 'em. It's no use to ask him to help us in this matter. He would not let us help him if he knew we were trying to do so. He's a lion when it's a matter of conscience, and a lamb all the rest of the time. Aldrich, listen! It's up to us two. Are you with me?"

"With all the will and strength there is in me," declared the young man, fervently. "But you will have to tell me what to do in this matter, Representative Clifford. I am all at sea."

"Didn't I tell you this is politics? I know what to do in a matter of politics. What do you suppose is going to happen in this parish when the word goes out that Father Leclair has been sent away? Not a whisper of it has got out as yet. He wouldn't even tell me until I happened in and found him packing that little box and made him explain. I say, what do you suppose will happen in this parish when the folks know?"

The patriarch did not require reply to that question.

"Why, there'll be a howl that will shake windows from here to the St. Croix, Aldrich. They have accepted Père Leclair as an institution. They have never thought far enough ahead to figure even that he will have to die some time. As for his being removed from this parish—they would as soon have expected to see some one come

along here and rip up one of those hills yonder! They will forget their grouch against the Yankees, they will despise Louis Blais, they will hate the men who have been stirring up trouble along this border, they will bellow like young ones who have been whipped."

"And Father Leclair will go away with glory in his soul, feeling that they have been saved by his sacrifice," suggested Aldrich, thoughtfully.

"It may be all right to consider it that way from a spiritual standpoint," growled the veteran of the legislature, "but from a political standpoint, not on your life, young man! When you go to turning your other cheek in politics you want to be sure to have spikes on that other cheek! I say 'Fight!' I say that Father Leclair is coming *back* to this parish after a lesson has been taught to these critters here who have heard the cheap yap of a demagogue and have forgotten the lifetime devotion of a saint. You and I will here and now shake hands on the pledge that we will bring this good priest back to this parish. Put your grit into this shake, my boy. Remember that we mean business."

The courage of the old man was reflected in the eyes of the younger; Aldrich understood that the politician had a plan.

"I'm going to give out the word of what has happened to this parish of Attegat! I'm going to make the parish ring with the news. I'm going to start out petitions to be signed on every road, along every lane, in every clearing. It must be done in a hurry, and here is where you fit, young man. Get busy! Arrange for the couriers. Be captain of the riders. Start 'em in all directions. Keep 'em going all night long. We can't afford to waste even minutes, for this thing must be put up to the bishop while it's fresh. And I tell you, Aldrich, that when I

have those names in hand and work the scheme I have in my mind it will mean that Father Leclair will come back to the home where he belongs—or else there's no science in politics! No, nor mercy in Heaven or justice in the works of God!"

XVIII

THE MEN WHO RODE THROUGH THE NIGHT

IN the village square of Attegat men clustered in groups, thrusting excited faces close, wagged their heads, and the rumble of their mournful voices went on and on interminably.

At first the voices had been shrill, raised in a chorus of disbelief. Père Leclair to be sent away into banishment—away to the mission of the lumber camps, away from the people who needed him—ah, no! That could not be! But conviction of the truth came at last after much talk; Notary Pierre Gendreau had so declared when they had asked him, besieging him in his little office. Representative Clifford told them so, glaring rebuke at them, telling them that enemies had been at work and that their own actions of the past few weeks had given those enemies their ammunition. Norman Aldrich verified the report. He had seen the new priest on his way to Attegat, and his name was Horrigan, an Irish master set over the flock of Acadians in the north. *Dieu nous garde!* How the tongues clattered! Ah, they had not understood that their priest could be taken away from them, they told each other. The Yankees had begun to persecute. They had tried to come together as Acadians and show the Yankees that there was danger in driving poor men too far! That was all. Men had told them

that they must show the Yankees another side of the Acadian character. Louis Blais had advised them!

While they talked they turned their eyes up at the window of Louis Blais above the new gilt sign. He did not show himself. Why had he not told them that politics might lead them into this sad trouble? What had all the politics in the world to do with the faith and the loyalty between Father Leclair and his poor people? What did it all mean? Surely, the great bishop, far to the south, did not realize what this astounding thing meant to the folks of Attegat! Thus ran the burden of the bitter lament, the groping for truth in this maze of disbelief, for it did not seem as though it could be true.

Representative Clifford and Norman Aldrich withdrew themselves from the lugubrious throng after a time and went with Notary Gendreau to his office.

"Like children who have played with a loaded gun—that's what they are!" sputtered the patriarch. "The deed has been done—the gun has been fired. Now let's see what the surgeon can do."

He sat down at the notary's battered table and drew a sheet of paper toward him. He pushed back his broad straw hat and began to write, wrinkling his brow, taking thought between sentences, scratching the pen through words, building his writing laboriously, line upon line. The others sat and watched him in silence, deferring to him, trusting him in a matter where politics was to the fore, for they understood well that the visitation upon the head of poor Père Leclair was a thunderbolt forged on the anvil of politics.

And the patriarch knew the hidden ways and the methods of politics!

He finished at last and sat back and read his screed through to himself, moving his lips vigorously.

"Now, gentlemen, hear this! We've got a hard rock to split. This, here, is only a wooden wedge. The water will be poured on it later.

"'To our Mighty and Revered Bishop,—Listen to this humble petition from the poor folks of Attegat. For thirty years the good Father Leclair has been our priest. He has welcomed our children as they have come into the world, joined the young people in blessed marriage, and laid our dead in the grave. He has encouraged the prosperous and cared for the poor. He understands us and there is no one in the world who can understand us as well. To you, Great Bishop, we lift our hands. If we have done wrong in Attegat put the punishment on us. We are not wise. We are not experienced in the ways of politics. We only know that we love our good priest. On our knees, in our little homes beside the great river, along the lanes, from the farms and the woods of the north, we implore you to send him back to us. We do not understand the great disputes. We only know that all Attegat sends this and weeps and listens for the word you are to return to us. Give us back our good Father Leclair, we beseech.'"

He questioned them with his gaze, turning from one to the other.

"You understand our people, Representative Clifford," stated the notary. "You have put in simple words what they would like to say for themselves. That is how all Attegat feels, sir. Hear those voices out there in the street!"

"It is the way *I* feel—only I haven't language half earnest enough," declared the old man. "I wish I knew the right words to use for the description of a martyr and

a hero. There's only one merit in what I have written—it comes right from the depths of my heart."

He pushed the paper across the table to the notary.

"Make a dozen copies in your best round hand, Brother Pierre. Paste on plenty of paper for the names. Aldrich, pick your men. Get horses that can gallop. We'll cover this parish from one end to the other before morning. Yell in front of the houses! Pound on the doors! Haul 'em out of bed! Let the children sign, too. We're waking the people up late—but they'll be wide awake before this thing is over."

He stood up and brandished his arms in his excitement. Tears were in his eyes, and he could not wink them back.

"My God, why is it that only a few of us really understand the heart of this thing—what lies under all the dispute and the politics! The people have been foolish, blind, misled. Wreck and ruin are headed this way! If the spiritual influence of that little father is taken out of this parish at just this time, when the folks need it most, that stone house down there will stand for the gravestone of all the hopes we have ever nursed!"

His emotion communicated itself to Aldrich.

"You shall have the names, sir. I will have my men at the door here before the copies are ready, notary."

A shout interrupted him. It was a wordless chorus of woe. It was almost ululation.

Aldrich was at the door of the office.

He saw Father Leclair riding slowly through the square, a passenger on a buckboard of which a grizzled *habitant* was the charioteer.

Men were crowding about him, whipping off their hats; women came running from yards here and there.

"But you are not going away, Père Leclair?" they

cried, over and over. They could not seem to find other words with which to express their incredulous grief.

The thin face of the priest under the broad hat was paler than usual. But he smiled bravely.

"This poor old body must pass on, my children," he told them, when they had become silent and they understood that he wished to speak. The grizzled *habitant* had stopped his horses, and now gazed straight ahead in dumb woe. "I leave behind my love, and if I have done you service in any way I leave behind the memory of it —so that you may return that kindness to others if I am not here to receive it from you. If you feel you owe me anything I ask you to pay it to the first you meet who may be in need."

Aldrich pressed through the throng. The notary, his wet pen in his hand, and the patriarch, doffing his straw hat, were at the officer's heels.

"I did not understand that you were to leave here so soon," protested the young man. "We are not prepared to see you go, Père Leclair."

"The command was explicit," returned the priest, gently. "I was ordered to depart forthwith to my new place." He leaned close to Aldrich. "If I seem to hurry away, remember that an old man cannot endure too much anguish. It is a bitter wound that has been dealt me, my son, and while I remain here it seems as though the knife is rankling in it. I must hurry away." These were the only words of complaint he uttered. He raised his head after a moment, and his face was serene once more.

"I have a long way to go. I must hasten on, my children!" He gave his hand to his three loyal friends, one after the other, and spoke to the man who sat beside him on the buckboard.

"Good-by, Father Leclair!" rumbled the men's voices,

and across the diapason of the chorus quavered the women's treble; and sobs threaded the sound.

So he passed out of the throng who stood with bared heads and who remained thus until the buckboard topped the hill. They peered after it and caught the last glimpse of the little figure wrapped in its frayed cassock. The old hound trotted behind in the dust.

Notary Gendreau's voice broke the awed hush. He shook his pen at the people.

"Come to the door of my office and wait, all you folks," he commanded. "There is a paper for you to sign. It is a petition to the great bishop of the diocese. It asks him to send good Père Leclair back to us."

They cheered excitedly, trooping at his heels.

"No, I do not guarantee that it will bring him back," stated the notary, with legal caution. "But let each tongue say a prayer as the hand writes the name, and then we will send off the paper and hope that God will speak for us to those in the high places."

They thronged at the door and crowded the narrow office and muttered soulfully as they wrote their names with painful efforts of those who use the pen but seldom. Many made their marks, and the notary wrote their names off against the crosses.

"Ah, it was for the big school on the hill that the priest worked and prayed," he told them, rebukingly; "he did not want the children of these fathers and mothers to make their crosses when the time came for them to sign their names."

Representative Clifford walked with Aldrich as far as the tavern door.

"I'll go home now," the patriarch informed the officer. "I want to do some thinking on this proposition. I wish that I could do more, my boy." His lips tightened

grimly. "But I shall hurt the good cause by showing myself too plainly in this matter between Père Leclair and his people. Blais would be sending word of that to the bishop, also."

"It is wicked as it stands, but it may be all for the best," declared the young man, enthusiastically. "Blais has done this. When the people know that he has done it he will be knifed at the caucus. You will go back to the legislature, sir. We shall be able to work together and make the State understand what ought to be done for these folks up here. I'm sure of it!"

"The courage of youth is a grand asset in a fight, my boy. Keep yours alive. You'll need a lot of it. But I've got to give you a word of old man's caution; the fight is just beginning. It hasn't been won. To-night you will find men in this district who will wail and smack their fists over their heads while they damn Louis Blais, and swear they will do anything to get back their good priest. Then they'll begin to talk about the Yankees again. I know the nature of these Acadians! One way to-day, the other way to-morrow, and hot and howling either way. We shall have with us a good proportion of the men who are safe on their lands. But we shall have against us the men who have been kicked out. It's a devil of a situation, I tell you! I've been among 'em—realize it—it all means trouble."

Aldrich knew, too. Uneasiness was in the look he gave the representative.

"You take it in politics, my boy, and if a man has a cow go dry, or rust strikes his potatoes, or the measles has a run in his family, he turns around and lays it all to the party in power. He gets excited and wants to throw the other fellow out and put the new fellow in. In this case up here I happen to be the old fellow. I got

discouraged the other day. I reckoned I would step aside. I saw that the men up here didn't want any more of me. For a little while I allowed my man's feelings to get the better of me as a politician. I've changed my mind, Aldrich. As a man I ought to be too modest to stand up here before you and say that I can do more for these people at the State Capitol than any other person I know of. As a politician I do say it. I know this Attegat end of the proposition; I also know the State House end. Louis Blais would go down there and wreck the whole thing. He will sell out his district; he will sell the blood of children if the landowners will pay him; and they will be on hand with the money next winter so as to nail down what they have already done and what they propose to do. I wouldn't be surprised if he has some of their money already. They want war here. They want these people to stir trouble so that they'll have a good excuse for beating them down into the dust for keeps. I see a possible way out of the trouble, my boy. You have already suggested that way. I intend to go back to the next legislature and work. There's one more good fight left in me. But even if I win at that legislative convention it means wicked doings up here. The thing may be so bad, may sound so bad outside of here, that the story of it may wreck all our hopes even if I do win," he stated, solemnly.

He put his gaunt hand on Aldrich's shoulder.

"These folks here are not like other people, my boy. They have got to be handled through their feelings. We need Father Leclair. We need him lord-awfully, Aldrich. The people understand better now what he has meant to them. He can come back and sway them toward the right. We must bring him back. Get your horses—get your men. Ride hard and keep at it. Bring the petitions to me after the names are on. I want to

see these poor people saved from their folly and from those who propose to ruin them. By the gods, we *will* save them! But if that little priest isn't back here to smooth the thing, to steer their emotions, I tell you solemnly that the ransom is likely to be signed and sealed with a bloody fist. So, ride hard, my boy."

He walked across the field, his hands behind him.

Aldrich found plenty of ready volunteers in the village of Attegat. He chose those who owned the best horses and marshaled them—intensely earnest men—at the office of Notary Pierre. The old scribe, his spectacles on the end of his nose, wrote with zealous haste in his best hand, translating the words of Representative Clifford into French, so that all who signed might first hear and know, might understand what they had lost from desolate Attegat, might ponder on what they sought to regain.

"Read it aloud to all." counseled Aldrich, as he sent away his men. "Tell them to remember those words. Tell them that rebellion against the good is always punished, and that if they can bring back Father Leclair to his parish they must always remember the sorrow of the time when he was sent away."

The bodeful prophecy of the patriarch was in his mind. He hoped the memory of those petitions might serve to mitigate the rancor of those unstable temperaments at convention time.

For his own route he chose the river road, the longest journey. But he had a better mount than the Acadian farmers who cantered away astride their Norman chunks.

So through that night rode those couriers in behalf of the good Père Leclair.

By broad highway, by winding road, by lane or forest trail, they sought out the people in their homes. From one end to the other of the great parish they scurried.

It was a wonderful night in Attegat! Across fields, by path, through dim forest, into all the scattered clearings, a rider went. There was the hail at the door, the beating of fists and whip-handle to waken the sluggards. To blinking listeners the words of the petition were read. Some of the people on the main road had heard already that the good father had been sent away. But upon others, those in the remote clearings, in the little houses along the hidden lanes, the news burst as the tidings of calamity.

Along the main road lived the more prosperous of Father Leclair's parishioners—they who brought the fruit of their fields to the big door of the priest's granary; in the remote places dwelt those whose scanty acres and rocky soil fed them meagerly—they were the ones who had been saved from hunger by the doles from the little door of the barn. The couriers read. The men groaned; the women gasped sobs; the children wept. What did it mean? What would happen to Attegat now? Yes, they had known that trouble had threatened. Men had talked to them and said that Father Leclair was in league with the Yankees. They did not like the Yankees. Yes, perhaps they had wondered why their priest should not hate the Yankees, too! Perhaps they had been angry then and had forgotten all he had done for his poor people. The bad men had whispered in their ears and had fooled them—ah, that was it!

But they would sign the paper. They would sign many papers. They would crawl on their knees to the church of Attegat. They would do novenas; their wives and their children would pray. They would vow candles. They would do all things and never forget again to be loyal and loving and obedient to their good priest! Thus ran the babble of the talk in the little houses where the poor folks

sat and kept grieving vigil after the couriers had gone on into the night! What had all the fuss been about? Yes, the Yankees had been taking away the lands. Their own homes had been threatened. But sending away the good priest would not remedy that sad trouble. There was mystery about it. They must go forth and ask questions of those who would know. The day of the convention was at hand, when they would go with their votes to send some one to the legislative assembly where laws are made for those who are oppressed! They hoped that there would be men at the convention to tell them the right things—yes, there would be good advisers there, men who would understand. They would all go to the convention in Attegat village! Thus the men in the little settlements canvassed the situation, flocking together, for sleep had been driven away. What had Père Leclair advised? They wished they could remember more clearly; but the bad men had been talking to them, and the troubles of those who had been driven from their homes had distracted all, and they had not listened to their good priest as carefully as they should have done! Ah, he must be brought back to advise them. They would listen and obey if he could come among them again!

Truly, Representative Clifford, as well as he knew his people, would have been further impressed with his own sagacity if he could have heard those men talking together in the night after the couriers had passed on.

Attegat did need Father Leclair in that crisis. The emotions of the people were seething. The people would follow the leader who could best command those emotions, who could by force of personality or appeal turn that fiery eagerness to be up and about something into the channels where accomplishment was promised. The patriarch understood the situation best of all, for he

viewed it with sure knowledge and the caution of age. This was the great crisis of that generation. The old was battling with the new—education and progress with prejudice and racial suspicions. The right man, the right word, could make of them good citizens; and then their salvation could be worked out by wisdom, not by war. The wrong man! There was the crux! Representative Clifford sat late that night and muttered his forebodings when he pondered on the mischief the wrong man could compass among those overwrought people.

Though Norman Aldrich had ridden the longest road, he was back to Attegat in the early morning, first of all the couriers. He had found that the folk of the river road knew all of what had happened. He was obliged to tell no long stories.

When he cantered past the stone house he saw Father Horrigan pacing the yard with militant stride, and he stopped his horse and walked him back when the priest signaled, for the gesture had been sharp and imperative.

"Mr. Officer, you cannot hide meddling from me by riding about that sort of business in the night."

"There was no secret about my errand, Father Horrigan. I have been about in behalf of a good friend, and the matter required haste."

"It requires nothing of the sort—none of your help, sir. I have stopped you to say this; by meddling in these affairs you are inviting some very serious interference in your own affairs." The lines in his face were very straight. His upper lip was set against the lower like a level against a board. "Take that word from me to others who may be contemplating the folly of interfering in a matter of discipline."

"I will do so, Father Horrigan," returned Aldrich, with cold respectfulness. He rode on. In his own heart he

knew that he was not guilty of intent to meddle in Church matters. But this was no affair of creed or denomination. He believed that he had a right to take the part of a good friend in a business where misunderstanding and politics had encroached upon justice.

He turned from the highway and rode across the fields to the house of Representative Clifford. He gave his crumpled paper into the hands of the old man, who reached for the document eagerly across the rail beside which Aldrich had halted his horse without dismounting.

"You were right last night about our need of Father Leclair in this trouble which is coming," stated the officer, soberly. "Under the grief of the people, because their old priest has been sent away, there's a deeper feeling. It wasn't voiced to me, sir. I can't tell you exactly how I knew it was there. But you know I have been riding on the long road where the folks have been driven by the sheriffs. It makes pretty dry tinder, sir, and I'm afraid of what may happen when the fire gets in there."

The patriarch slowly creased the paper into neater lines while he gazed reflectively upon Aldrich.

"It will amount to this, my boy," he said. "What you say clinched my conviction. We have got to fight unless we propose to give up to the renegades who are trying to team these people. I swear, I won't give up! I'd rather have the fight and then explain it to the folks outside of Attegat, if I can, than allow these people to be led off into a bog by any such false guide as Louis Blais."

He clapped the folded paper across his palm.

"A strange and a subtle thing is the human mind, Aldrich. These names on a petition to the bishop! You're rather a hard-headed fellow; you may be thinking underneath that it's all a bit of foolishness. But I tell you, in men's affairs there's a psychological instrument as

well as a psychological moment. I believe that the bishop of this diocese is going to do something a little later without clearly realizing just why he did it. Don't think I've gone crazy! But when a fellow gets old he thinks less of what the two fists can accomplish and more about what the mind can perform. I have a plan about these petitions. No matter what it is. I haven't exactly the words for expressing my own thoughts about it. But I tell you, my boy, I'm trusting to these papers as the psychological instrument."

He paused and fixed Aldrich with grave gaze.

"Right ahead of us, here in Attegat, is going to arrive that other thing—the psychological moment. I want to come out of the thing right. For use in that moment we need something else than clubs and guns. I believe that Père Leclair could furnish the magic thing we need for the control of the tempers of these people. If we don't get him back here, then we've got to hope that God is going to send us something else."

He ceased abruptly and went into the house, calling over his shoulder: "Remember that the old men dream dreams and behold visions, Aldrich. I don't dare to talk to you any longer. You'll begin to think I'm in my second childhood and have gone to playing with toys."

Aldrich rode to the tavern. As an officer of the border customs he was used to vigils; he had ridden long and hard on many occasions, and the record of his exploits in the capture of smugglers had made his reputation safe at headquarters. Now, dizzy with sleeplessness and aching with exhaustion, he felt that the exigencies of love and altruism were proving more racking than those of his office. But his heart was cheerful, nevertheless. He had never shirked duty. His conscience was clear as to those impetuous days he had taken for his own affairs.

Far across the fields on the hilltop, where the gaunt chimneys marked the site of the training-school, he saw moving figures against the sky, scattered groups of children clustered under the trees; and the white gleam of tents here and there showed that Master Donham was courageously grappling with difficulties and was housing his school once more.

So his own labors for these children of New Acadia were comfortingly emphasized for him by what he saw in the distance on the hilltop; altruism might exact much, but he did not regret.

Dotted against the green fields were white gowns; he wondered which one marked Evangeline Beaulieu. He had struggled valiantly for his love; he was radiantly glad.

But he was weary, weary! He reeled in his saddle as he galloped on to his rest at the tavern.

XIX

THE DRAFTING OF BILLEDEAU

EPRESENTATIVE Ambrose Clifford paced to and fro, his hands clasped behind his back, keeping to the shaded side of the village square of Attegat. The afternoon breeze ruffled the leaves of the maples over his head and shed checkerings of light upon his white beard and his broad straw hat. Doves at his feet waddled and cooed and eyed him wistfully, recognizing a friend who had often fed them. But this day he paced on, to and fro, without heeding the doves. Now and then he paused in his march and eyed some man who appeared in the square and moved across it listlessly.

At these times the patriarch would wrinkle his brow in deep reflection. He seemed to be weighing certain considerations connected with the man whom he was regarding. Whatever these considerations were, he would shake his head and resume his slow march.

Men passed and doffed hats to him respectfully; but other men, men who drove through the square in buckboards, men who were plainly from the remoter sections, these scowled at him when they touched their hats.

Some of these men halted their buckboards in the square and climbed the stairs to Louis Blais's office. Occasionally Blais came to the window and leaned out

over the new gilt sign to gaze on the tall old man who was pacing under the maples.

Now and then Clifford halted and looked across to some house or at some especial man with fresh intentness. Once or twice he started in that direction, but retraced his steps to the shade under the maples.

"A psychological instrument is a touchy thing to handle," he muttered, and he stroked with his corded hand a parcel that bulked in his breast pocket.

A girl entered the square, coming down the road from the hill. She hesitated a moment when she saw the old man, and then went to him. She was in white, and her face under her broad hat was glorious with the hues of youth, softened by the delicate brown of outdoor life.

"My courtesy to Mademoiselle Evangeline Beaulieu," he said, swinging off his hat. "How goes the roofless school?"

"I fear that a heavy hand has now come into the parish of Attegat, sir. Many of the scholars did not come to school this morning." She looked down the long street toward the stone house.

He shook his head slowly. "We must all bow our heads for a while, Mam'selle. These are strange times. Prejudice and misunderstanding have roiled the waters of knowledge. But we mustn't be discouraged."

"There is no discouragement up there, sir," she returned, with a wistful smile. "There are many who are loyal, parents and children. We are all praying that those in the high places will understand the school very soon."

"I believe they will, my dear. There are liars abroad here in this land. And it is an easy thing to lie about the other man's creed and beliefs. But the other man can win in the end if he is patient and confounds the liars by

deed instead of word. That's what we will do in regard to the big school."

She broke upon the moment of silence that ensued.

"I have heard that many riders went about the parish last night, sir. I believe that they were to report to you. By chance, did any one say that he had seen my father? I am told he is not at his home. I have written twice to him, and I have not received a reply. I have written again." She exhibited a letter. "I am on my way to post it. You understand the dreadful trouble which has come between us."

"There was no word of him. But I will make inquiries, Mam'selle. Perhaps he has been seen."

She hesitated, staring up at him, plainly engaged with some problem in her thoughts. Then she turned from him and drew a crumpled letter from its hiding-place in her breast.

"I did not intend to show this to any one, sir. I should have destroyed it at once, I suppose. It is slander that is too vile to be noticed. But if there is a threat here, if some enemy intends to do further mischief, perhaps I ought to ask advice from some one wiser than I. Will you read it, sir?"

It was written in a hand crudely disguised.

"Unless Evangeline Beaulieu wants to be suspected of helping to cover up the murder of her own father she had better ask the Yankee customs sneak where he hid the body of Vetal Beaulieu after the shooting in the woods."

"I would not allow such a scurrilous thing to disturb me," he advised her promptly. "Your father has been about his affairs within a few days. And if you will

pardon the reference, Mam'selle, he seemed to be healthy and active—if reports are true. No harm has come to him. He may be staying out of sight just now for some good reasons of his own."

She received the letter from his hand and tore it up.

"It is wicked slander—cruel and wicked both," she insisted. "My poor father has let himself be led into these ways by a scoundrel."

"Have you said anything to Aldrich about that letter?"

"I cannot. It would be an insult to an honest young man to mention such a thing to him."

"I will think it over," the old man assured her. "I will have news from your father soon, I am sure. I would not worry, were I you. This is more of the same persecution. Vetal Beaulieu is not a man who can stay hidden long, even if he wants to help the plans of a scamp by hiding."

"There comes Fiddler Billedeau riding into the village," she cried. "He sees everybody—he knows all things in this land up here. I will ask him for news of my father."

She hurried away across the square. For a moment Clifford followed her with his eyes. Then he looked at Billedeau; and, as he looked, his face cleared. He put on his hat and swung across the square with the air of a man who has suddenly settled a problem.

"When one is looking for a psychological instrument," he said, aloud, "he must not be too hasty in his choice. I know now why I have been waiting here so long."

Billedeau was shaking his head in reply to the girl's eager questions when Clifford came to him.

"I have not seen him, Mam'selle. I only know that he took the horses and the cows away from the poor folks who owed money to him, and that he went away toward

Monarda, and that the young man of the customs was very close behind him and was asking all for news of Vetal Beaulieu." He smiled shrewdly. "I hope he found him and that Vetal Beaulieu took back the unkind words he said that night in Bois-de-Rancourt clearing."

She flushed at the little joke. She did not smile. That hateful, anonymous note—absurd, diabolical as it was—had left its sooty suggestion of evil in her mind. She did not for an instant admit that she believed that harm had come to her father from any source; but the fiddler was chattering the border gossip, what every one knew, that Norman Aldrich had gone forth in quest of Vetal Beaulieu, searching for a man who had sworn deadly enmity toward this Yankee lover of Evangeline Beaulieu. In stress of feelings the mind gallops. The warning words of Supple Jack Hebert flashed into her thoughts. He had said that when a man threatens and the news goes abroad of his threats, then if anything happens there may be blood on his head, if not on his hands.

She held her peace, wondering why such thoughts should come to her. Norman had not found her father; he had returned discouraged because he had failed to find Beaulieu to have that man-to-man talk with him. But where was Vetal Beaulieu, and what evil was behind the hand that penned that note?

Her mind was taken from her own problems as soon as the representative reached the buckboard.

"Billedeau," he began, briskly. "I have important business with you. Stable your horse with a friend where it will be safe for some days to come."

He checked the fiddler's meek question and smiled at his astonishment.

"It is not a matter to be talked over in the street, my good friend. Put your old horse in a comfortable place.

It is a long walk to my house, Mam'selle. May I have a corner of Madame Ouillette's sitting-room for a chat with Anaxagoras?"

They walked slowly; and the fiddler, trotting on his short legs, overtook them before they reached the gate of the cottage.

"You shall sit with us and hear what I have to say to our good friend, Mam'selle, for it is something very near to your heart," said the old representative.

Billedeau perched himself on the edge of a hard chair, crushing his shabby hat between his knees. His eyes were very round and his face was very grave, for the veteran legislator—the old man who had helped to make the laws and who had dwelt in the halls of the high places far away from Attegat—awed him. In silence, in wonder, with respect, he listened.

The girl displayed as much wonderment. The demeanor of the old man promised that this was no ordinary affair to which the fiddler had been called.

Both of them watched Clifford while he drew a packet of papers from his pocket and laid them on his knee.

"Billedeau, you know all the news. You know that the good Father Leclair has been sent away from his parish because his enemies have been up to mischief. You have heard that men rode abroad in the night and asked the people to sign papers. These are the papers they have signed—and they have prayed while they were signing. These are precious papers, good Billedeau. They mean much when one understands the folks who signed them and how they signed with hope and tears. I know you understand."

The fiddler crushed his hat more nervously, and his round eyes grew moist.

"I was with my friends—I was at one of the little

houses when the paper was brought, sir, and I signed." He pointed a stubby finger at the packet, and his voice was husky with awe. "It will go to the great bishop far away, eh? His hands will touch it—his eyes will see it?" The packet had taken on the aspect of a solemnly sacred object; its destination made it seem a wonderful, a mystic thing, since he had realized for what use it was designed.

"It is to go to the hands of the bishop." Clifford caressed it.

The old fiddler stared at the papers, fascinated by the thoughts the packet suggested.

"You, yourself, will carry them, eh?"

"Oh no, I cannot do that, Anaxagoras. I should spoil all."

"Ah, M'ser, there is no one else in Attegat who has met the great men as you have met them. There is no one else besides the honored Representative Clifford who will dare to raise his eyes to the great bishop and tell him about the papers and the poor people."

"Your bishop would not even receive me if I should go to him on such an errand. He would call it insolence. He would not listen. All would be ruined. The man who must go to him is one of the people who are praying to have their good priest restored to them. He must be humble, he must be patient, he must know all the people and understand what the people have lost, and then he can tell the bishop how Father Leclair is needed in Attegat. Billedeau, there is no one else who knows the folks of Acadia as you know them. You must carry the papers to the bishop."

Billedeau dropped his hat to the floor and swayed in his chair.

Terror, astonishment, stupefaction set his features into a rigid mask and paralyzed his tongue.

"Yes, you must go, Anaxagoras. I have been down there in the village square walking under the trees, looking at the men as they came and went, trying to decide who should carry the precious papers away. I could not find the right one. But the moment I saw you it was all settled in my mind. You came like an answer to prayer. Why, there is no one else! I should have thought of you first of all!"

The girl stood up, radiant in her excitement and joy.

"I believe God has led Monsieur Billedeau among the people, to and fro, all the years, and has preserved him for this service," she declared, raptly. "Of all others he can speak best for them. He has been in all the homes; he loves them, and they love him. Oh, I have seen it all with my own eyes, sir! Out of his heart and his knowledge he can speak to the great bishop for the poor folks of Attegat."

The old fiddler's lips worked wordlessly. He ground a dusty boot upon the crushed hat which lay at his feet. He writhed like one who feels agony in his veins.

"Listen, Anaxagoras, and understand what this service may mean. The people are inflamed. This trouble has made two parties. Men of the stamp of Louis Blais will work upon those who hate the Yankees, and they will be ready to fight. But others will be as ready to fight all who have turned with Louis Blais against the good priest. We must have Father Leclair back in Attegat. He is the only one who can bring the people together. They will not fight across him when he is back here again. He can plead, he can make them understand how bad it will be to fight. He will make them wait until wise heads can bring matters straight once more."

"The bishop will listen to you. He will understand that you are one of the people," cried the girl; and a smile

from the patriarch encouraged her to proceed. "It will be like the poor folks talking to him. He will see them through your eyes, M'ser Billedeau. Go to him as you are; talk to him as you talk to us about the Acadians, whom you love so well."

"The psychological instrument!" muttered Clifford, in his beard. "I'm on the right track in this thing. A bright girl sees the point in a jiffy."

He arose and went to Billedeau and put his hand on the fiddler's shoulder. The round eyes which slowly turned up to his were like the eyes of a dog under the lash.

"Come, my good man, take heart. You are going out to save your people and bring your good friend back to his stone house and his garden—back to his church and those who need him. It's a grand service."

At the touch on his shoulder Billedeau slid from the hard chair and crumpled down on his knees.

"Oh, great Representative Clifford," he mourned, one hand upraised in appeal, one hand tugging at his constricted throat, "you have called me by my name—that's Billedeau. You have looked at me as though you knew me. I do not understand. Yes, I am Billedeau. But I'm much afraid that you don't know I *am* Billedeau—the old fiddler—only the old fiddler! So I only dream that you talk to me as you have talked."

"It is no dream—not this!" declared Clifford, brusquely. "I want you to be very wide awake from now on, my friend. I'm putting a big thing into your hands, but you are just the one to do it."

"No! I cannot do it! I am nothing but Fiddler Billedeau, I say. You do not understand. I do not have even a roof over my head. I am what Vetal Beaulieu says I am, though my good friends have made me forget it. I am a vagabond."

"You are a good man, you have done your share for your fellow-men in the world. Some are called for this purpose, some for that, Anaxagoras. Now, you are called on for this greater service. You must carry the papers to the bishop."

The man on the floor began to shiver. It was the shuddering of one whom mortal fear has overtaken.

"The bishop!" he stuttered. "The great bishop! Billedeau there! Billedeau daring to speak to him! Ah, no! That cannot be."

"Look a-here, Anaxagoras, have the folks up and down the river ever done anything for you in all the years past?"

This was a point on which the old fiddler had convictions that not even his present distraction could jar.

"They have given me all," he wailed. "But it has not been as though I begged, sir. They gave me friendship first. Then they gave me the things which friends give to friends. That is the way all has been given me."

"Exactly! Now, Anaxagoras, I have lived a long time in the world, and I have been about that world quite a lot. Do you think I know a thing or two?"

"You are the very wise man. I have always said that, Representative Clifford. You know the wise way about all things."

"Very well! Now I tell you out of that wisdom, Anaxagoras, that of all the others in the world you are the right one to carry those papers to the bishop. Sit back into your chair."

He urged the stricken man gently back upon the seat.

"I say again, you are the one man who can do this thing as it ought to be done. I can't stop to explain why. You'll have to take my word for it."

Representative Clifford had decided not to go into

details with the overwrought fiddler regarding "psychological instruments."

"Furthermore, you don't need any reminders of what the folks have done to make your life comfortable. I'll admit you have done a lot for them in your way, Anaxagoras. But now there arises an occasion when you can do the one grand and noble thing. The bishop is a man—a man who has made a mistake, as we all know up here. You are a man. You can go to him. He is a good man. He will treat you kindly. He will see at once that you are a good man. Now, in the name of the poor people of Attegat, I call on you for this duty." He straightened himself and spoke solemnly, understanding the Acadian nature when emergency called, and called in the right way. "Anaxagoras Billedeau, will you be a coward and fail to do your duty?"

There was a long silence in the room. Clifford did not speak again. He knew his man and the temperament of those simple folks of the border. He did not discount his cause by further appeals.

The old fiddler, whose life had been so full of devotion to his friends, whose scheme of action had been to repay kindness with all the fervor that was in him, was arguing that question of martyrdom with himself.

To his simple nature the duty which was required of him was like to martyrdom.

In all his life he had never been beyond the confines of the country of New Acadia. The "outside" was to him a land full of high and mighty personages who rushed about their affairs with scant regard for other beings. Once he had ventured far enough across the boundary which he had set to his domains to view a railroad train, and he had seen it roar past and had wondered how men and women dared to trust themselves in the bowels of

that dragon. And where *was* this great bishop? He turned appealing gaze from the patriarch to the girl. His contorted face showed the agony of this battle within him.

Clifford knew when to add the last word.

"I want to say this, Anaxagoras: the journey will be made easy for you. I will write down every move you are to make. You can go and you can come back in perfect safety. I understand all about such things, as you well know."

The inerrant instinct of femininity put in just the right word then. Evangeline understood one phase of the character of such a man as Billedeau even better than Clifford understood.

"For your food on the journey you shall not worry, M'ser," she said, consolingly. "Perhaps you will not know how to buy food in the strange places where there will be no good friends to give you a share of their store. So with my own hands I will cook for you the things I know you like—I will pack a big bucket so that you may have abundance for the way down and the journey back. It shall be good Acadian food, and you shall not realize that you are far from home."

She went to him and patted his hands, which he was wringing as he fought with his fears.

"You are wise, M'ser," he stammered at last. "Mam'-selle, you are good. It is said I must go—that I am the right one to go. I am not wise. It seems strange that I am the right one. But you know better than I can understand. You call on me and say, 'Anaxagoras Billedeau, help the poor people!'" He spread his palms to them, wistful, submissive, resigned, trembling, yet courageous. "So I will go!"

XX

THE JOURNEY OF BILLEDEAU

ANAXAGORAS BILLEDEAU waited at the wayside railroad station where the stage from the north had dropped him. He sat in the sun on a knife-nicked bench, and between his guarding feet was a huge wooden bucket, painted blue. He was bolt upright, alert, rigid, tense, and on his countenance was reflected the trepidation which convulsed his soul. With one hand he kept assuring himself that the packet was safe; it was in a pocket of his flannel shirt, and his waistcoat and coat were buttoned jealously over it.

The other trembling hand frequently dodged into one of his trousers pockets, like a weasel holing game. Money was in that pocket, and money was a strange guest in the pocket of Anaxagoras Billedeau. He had always known that money was an uncomfortable possession. He had seen on many occasions the trouble that money had wrought for others. Never before had he felt money in his pockets—a flat little wad of paper that always seemed to be hiding itself from his fingers, working into seams of his garments, into folds of the cloth, when he changed his position. Until he found it he gasped, his eyes rolled, and his heart jumped. Ah, yes, he pondered, money was an uncomfortable possession. Since he had taken it from the hand of the great Repre-

sentative Clifford and had tucked it away as deeply as his pocket would allow he had not known one moment of peace. The old fiddler muttered to himself his convictions on the subject of money.

Without money he had lived his life till then; he had ridden to and fro and had been welcome in all the little homes, and he had been contented and happy and without care. And now that the hateful money was in his pocket he was restless, continually jumping with fresh alarms; he was suspicious of all men, for he had been warned that men lay in wait for the unwary who had money in their pockets. Surely he, Anaxagoras Billedeau, would be glad when he got home into Acadia once more and could place back in the hand of Representative Clifford the remainder of that accursed money. For the first time in his life he dreaded the approach of men, he felt bitter fear in his heart; and the most of his discomfort, he knew, was caused by that little wad of paper in his trousers pocket.

However, that constant uneasiness on account of the money kept his thoughts away from the one gigantic thing that he had hardly dared to squint at in his ponderings; he kept his mind turned resolutely away, as one keeps his eyes away from the sun when it is overhead and blistering. The bishop! He was to see the bishop! Before his eyes would again look upon the domed hills of the Acadian country, before he would behold the glint of the river once more and see the bateaux drifting and the oars splashing, he would have seen the great bishop! That thought had come to him once, and it had tingled in every fiber of his being like an electric shock. His temples had throbbed, his sight had gone black, a delirious thrill of fear swept him, and he came back to his senses as though recovering from a swoon; and since then he

had kept his mind on other matters. The money—the packet! He held his hands on them and was helped to keep his mind off the bishop.

The sun showed up his rusty clothes pitilessly.

The old fiddler did not know that Evangeline's woman's impulse had been to array their messenger in new garments from the scanty stock of the village general store.

The patriarch had been wiser than she.

"Let the bishop see Anaxagoras as he is—a leaf from the book of life up here. We cannot bring the bishop to Attegat, so we must send a real bit of Attegat to him. It will be serious enough business for Anaxagoras as it is. So long as he can feel like himself, my dear, he may be able to pull through. New clothes would overwhelm him."

Anaxagoras had not thought at all upon the matter of clothes. As well might one expect a sheep to take thought upon the matter of raiment.

He shivered when the distant engine hooted its alarm at last; he shrank back when the clanging creature wheezed past him.

"Follow the men—go into the car where you see the men go," Clifford had told him. He had realized that the fiddler would be more at ease in the smoking-car among the men, where smoke wreaths floated and where the scene would remind him of the big rooms of the border taverns.

Anaxagoras took the first seat in the car and sat straight, not daring to lean back. Anxiously he drew out the paper on which Representative Clifford had written the instructions for the journey. Yes, he had done right; he had bought his ticket, and that ticket was in his waistcoat pocket. A man with gold on his cap would come and ask for that ticket. Very well! Anaxagoras unfolded the long strip of ticket and held it before him, pinching it

tightly between thumb and finger. He stared anxiously when the man with gold on his cap punched the ticket and gave it back.

That ticket represented much money; it was another possession that entailed worry and distrust of his fellows. Surely, the world where money ruled was a most uncomfortable world!

So he rode, hour after hour, the trucks clattering and bumping under his seat, the landscape blurring before his eyes. The train stopped, the train started; men came and men went; and the fiddler sat bolt upright, his eyes straight ahead.

He dared to show his ticket at last to a brakeman, and he was so meek and so wistful that the man was not brusque. He told Anaxagoras that when the train arrived at the junction he would direct him aright.

There was a wait at the junction. The old man went to a corner of the big room and opened his bucket and munched his food thankfully. He was encouraged. The brakeman had spoken kindly. Friends do rise up in behalf of the humble, he pondered thankfully! That brakeman had enlisted the services of one of the station hands, and Anaxagoras would be put on board the right train when it arrived.

So he found himself riding on again, once more in a cross-seat near the door, for it seemed presumption to venture farther into the bowels of the car.

At last they came to a city. It was night, and the flashing lights of streets and buildings, as the train rumbled slowly along, bewildered and dazzled him.

He showed the paper on which Representative Clifford had written, and another man was kind. He must wait many hours at the city—most of the night; his train would leave in the early morning.

Once more he found a corner and opened his bucket. He ate, but the food might as well have been sawdust, for his wonder and his excitement dulled all taste.

He sat at a window of the railroad station as he ate. Electric cars went rocking past, and there were weird flashes of blue and green lights, snappy, sparkly lights, at the end of the long pole above them. He had heard of such cars; he had never thought he would behold them. The lights of the city about him blazed in his eyes, flared up, and spread upon the skies in banner-like rays. Hustle and bustle and hurry! It was all very wonderful to Anaxagoras Billedeau as he sat stiffly upright and munched his Acadian barley-bread.

Sleep came upon him—sleep that his astonishment, his apprehensiveness regarding his treasures, his thrills when he remembered that he must see and speak with the great bishop, could not drive away. The seats in the station were not made to lie down upon. But he curved his short legs around the arm-irons as best he could and dozed fitfully. In the dawn he heard a man bawl the name of the State's metropolis. He had been told to wait for that announcement, and he picked up his bucket and climbed the steps of that car which men entered with cigars in their mouths.

There were many villages, many cities, and he stared with wide-open eyes at all the strange spectacles he saw.

No longer were there men of his ilk in the car—such men as he had seen in the train on the branch line. Here were brisk men wearing clothes such as he had never seen on the border. They talked of matters of which he had never heard. The panorama outside shifted with dizzying swiftness, and at every station new groups came past him along the car aisle. He peered eagerly and

listened and ate from his blue bucket as unobtrusively as he could. And he made sure of his precious packet and of the little wad of money very often.

It was night again when he arrived at the great city of the State.

He made his way timorously across tracks, following the throng. On his paper was written the name of a hotel. Representative Clifford had told him it was near the station, that it was small and homelike, and that he might go there with confidence. But the night outside the railroad station was filled with blaze and blare. Huge wagons clattered, cars clanged past; it was a world of tumult and tangle. He had accepted the directions of the paper as his gospel of peregrination. He wondered if he would be disobeying the great man of Attegat if he did not seek the hotel. He started to go, prompted by that thought. But courage failed him at the door of the station. Within the big room there were many benches. There were dim corners. He was sure that Representative Clifford would forgive him if he did not brave that wild storm of humanity in the streets. So he sat himself down with his bucket between his feet and resigned himself to wait for day.

He was at the end of his journey; he was in the city where the great bishop dwelt. Now that the distractions and the terrors of travel were behind him he could not divert his thoughts from what lay before him. He quivered with the intensity of his awe. A night, only a few hours of darkness, between him and the duty which weighed upon his soul!

"You will tell him of the people. You will describe the little farms and how the men and women work and the children long to learn about the ways that will make them wise and able," Representative Clifford had told him. "It

will not be hard, Billedeau, when you have opened your mouth and have started to talk. You know it all. You know all the people. You know what Père Leclair has done for them. The words will come, for you love your friends. It will not be hard."

He sat there gasping, and wondered if he would be able even to open his mouth.

To be sure, he had the packet to give the great bishop. He would kneel and give him the packet. The bishop would look at it; he would read the names and the wonderful writing at the head of the names to see what it all was about. And he, Billedeau, could wet his lips and open his mouth and be ready to answer the questions. Then he would fill his thoughts with all the children of the broad parish, the little children who looked forward to the future with hope; he would be looking at the bishop's feet, and he would shut his eyes and behold all the men of the narrow farms, the men who worked so hard and earned so little; he would remember the women and the girls, wistful and waiting for news from this wonderful errand; and, most urgent spur of all, he would have before him the kind, generous, humble little priest who had been sent away into the wilderness, away from the stone house and the big barn and all he had worked so long for. It was strange that he, Anaxagoras Billedeau, had been chosen from all the others for this journey; well, he must show that underneath that old coat of his he had the old spirit of Acadia! That had been his boast about the others of the border. Under his tremors he felt it stir now, when he thought of the poor folks, his good friends, waiting to hear what he had accomplished. Yes, he would wait for the day, and he would go forth and perform this duty which had been laid upon him! Had he not had all favors and kindnesses at their hands? Should

he be faltering and cowardly now, when he had this grand opportunity for repaying?

Weariness had departed from him; his fears were calmed. He waited for the dawn.

He was abroad in the streets with the first daylight, for the streets were quiet and invited him. His paper gave him simple instructions: he was to ask the way to the bishop's house from any big man who wore brass buttons and had a queer, white shell of a *chapeau*. This man, so he was told, walked the streets for the purpose of being kind to strangers—the great city paid him money for that purpose; so the fiddler went forward courageously, peering about, searching for such a big man. He followed the directions of his paper with implicit faith in the wisdom of the man who had written thereon.

He walked along, his heavy bucket on his arm.

It did not occur to him that this journey, this quest, might have been simplified, that a shrewder escort might have been his shadow as far as the bishop's door. He accepted the task, as it was, as the only natural mode of procedure.

Representative Clifford, in his sagacity, had weighed that phase of the matter. Anaxagoras Billedeau had come alone from the north country; his ingenuousness need not be tasked by those who might ask him who had brought him to the door of the bishop's house. As to the heading of the great petition, it was in the handwriting of Notary Pierre Gendreau. As to who had chosen him? Anaxagoras Billedeau knew that he was to return but one answer: he was to say simply that he had come on behalf of the people, because the people had been so good to him.

A guileless nature must not be charged with too much toil of dissimulation. So Clifford had reflected when he had pondered upon the pilgrimage of this "psychological

instrument." Billedeau had nothing on his mind except his direct duty, and now he walked the long street with martyr's courage, for he had resolved to do that duty; yet he shivered and his eyes were dimmed by black shadows when he reflected that duty was leading him to the mighty bishop of the diocese!

He came at last to a huge building, the most mammoth structure on which he had ever laid his eyes. He took his stand at the edge of the sidewalk and gazed up at it. Monstrous columns supported its lofty porch, and above the roof a golden dome flashed in the rays of the rising sun.

Poor Fiddler Billedeau had never devoted much thought to the potentates of this world. Of the names and the qualities and the state and the abodes of rulers he was ignorant. But this palace seemed to be fitted for the housing of that one whom he placed above all others.

He lowered his eyes, and lo! before him there stood one of those for whom he had been seeking, a man with brass buttons and the queer hat. This man was eyeing the strange figure of the fiddler with just as much curiosity as the fiddler displayed in his own gaze. Thus does one half of the world seem odd to the other half!

Billedeau was startled into his patois, for the big man had hard eyes.

"L'Eveque— j'aimerais à voir l'Eveque, M'sieur!"

"Give it to me in Yankee, uncle."

"The bishop—the great bishop—I have come to see the bishop," faltered Anaxagoras. "He lives there, eh?"

"Oh no! Not in City Hall, my friend. I'm afraid he wouldn't mix well with the politicians."

It was plain that he was a kindly man, this policeman. Once more was the old fiddler finding that ingenuous humility begets kindness even in a heedless world. The

officer drew the old man gently along the sidewalk, his clutch on his elbow, and at a street corner pointed over the roofs.

"That spire, my friend—the tall spire with the golden cross—that's the cathedral. The bishop's house is right beside it. Follow along this street, take the next turn to the right, keep your eyes on the cross."

Billedeau plodded on, shifting his bucket from side to side, his chin upraised, his eyes on the cross. The early bustlers in the street made way for him, for his nose was in the air and he did not swerve. Follow the cross! To his religious nature there was something of an omen in those words of the big man of the brass buttons.

His heart seemed to beat high up and chokingly in his throat. Under that cross he would find the bishop! There was his goal! The moment of the trial of his fortitude was upon him. The massive visage of the cathedral's façade awed him; but he was comforted, also. This was his church. The great spirit of its protection seemed to reach out from it and envelop him, that rusty little wanderer from the north country. All the generations of devoutness behind him had contributed the utter faith, the earnest loyalty, the devoted confidence which thrilled his soul as he came into the shadow cast by the towering spire. Here was his church!

Men and women were detaching themselves from the growing throng of the street and were going into the cathedral through the great door; men and women were coming out into the sunshine, their faces showing that they had been for a few moments with God.

Anaxagoras Billedeau looked upon them and understood what their expressions signified. Of all of them he had most need of new courage with which to face duty. He tiptoed in through the great doors.

The vast interior was dim and cool. Far away, the altar glowed on his vision, shafts of sunlight illumining it. There were queer, muffled, mystic sounds, little echoes in the groined arches over him, those sounds one always hears in spacious interiors. He went into a dim corner and set his bucket down and kneeled, his eyes toward the altar, and prayed for courage. He did not presume to ask for the success of this mission of his; surely that was an affair too great for his poor mind to concern itself with. That was in the hands of the others. He humbly besought that he might be able to perform that which he had been sent to do. Then, comforted and heartened, he picked up his burden and went out into the sunshine.

In his absorption he took no account of time. It seemed as though a whole day must have passed since he walked out of the railroad station. Everything was unreal. A tower clock somewhere clanged six, and bells and whistles made an uproar, but Anaxagoras Billedeau was oblivious to all but his errand. He passed under the archway into the diocesan grounds. An ivy-covered *porte cochère* marked the entrance to the great bishop's house. For one moment, as he looked that way, the earth seemed to sway and heave under his feet. But away from that dim corner in the great cathedral he had carried that which had armored his spirit and panoplied his resolve: he walked sturdily under the masonry that shrouded the bishop's door and rapped on the bishop's oak. There was a bell, but he knew nothing of bells. He waited, but no one came. Then he rapped again.

At last the door was opened by a priest whose face expressed some wonderment and a bit of vexation. It was a father who had been assigned for the early mass.

"The bishop," gasped the old fiddler—"I have to see the great bishop."

"It is much too early to see the bishop, my good man. And it is not easy to see him at any time. Where do you come from?" The priest was surveying this peculiar visitor with interest.

"From the parish of Attegat, father."

The priest lifted his eyebrows.

"I come with names—with the names of the poor people—for the sake of the good Père Leclair they have signed." He beat his hand upon the thick packet in his breast. He choked back his excitement. "It is sad in Attegat, and I have come, for I know all the poor folks. I am their friend."

"But what have you in that bucket?" inquired the priest, suspiciously.

"I bring what I eat, for I am the poor man. I do not know where to buy. I am not used to the world outside."

"But you cannot see the bishop now. This is all very strange, my man. I do not know whether you can see him at all. It is not for me to say. You must ask others. Come again—come at nine o'clock. Ask at the door for Father Callahan."

Anaxagoras stood for a time staring disconsolately at the closed portal. From the front of the bishop's house stretched a lawn, broken with shrubbery. He trudged gingerly across the velvet grass and sat down on his bucket behind some little trees. He could see the face of a tower clock over the roofs. He fixed his gaze on the slowly moving hands and waited for the hour of nine. The early clatter of the street settled into the dull roar of traffic. He could hear the strange cries of hucksters beyond the wall of the garden—meaningless jargon; and he wondered what all this babble was about, and was infi-

nitely homesick for the sloping hills and the blue bosom of the fair St. John.

Up there, when he rode along the checkerings of shadow and sunshine, or when the boys and girls danced before him while his fiddle sang, ah, how the moments winged their way! Here, where he was so lonely, though so many of humankind flocked about him, the hands of the great clock seemed to make hours of minutes. When he looked away, when he lifted his eyes to the golden cross or peered wistfully at the closed door under the *porte cochère*, the hands seemed to stand still.

Father Callahan—that was the name! It was strange to his Acadian tongue, and he repeated it many times.

When, at last, after an eternity of waiting, the hands of the clock marked nine, he plodded once more to the door. He bore his blue bucket with him; it was something of Acadia to which he might cling.

"Father Callahan—I am to see him," he told the acolyte who opened the door. "I was told to come at nine. Father Callahan, oui. I was told that," he protested, eagerly, for doubt smoldered in the eyes of the man at the door.

The door was swung wider, and Anaxagoras stumbled into the bare hall, with its stiff, cold wainscoting and the shiny benches where petitioners were wont to wait.

At last came a priest who was burly, broad of face, one whose heels clicked sharply on the cement floor.

"And now what is it you want, my man?" His tones clicked as sharply as his heels. This was not the bishop; no, this was very much a man; the old fiddler stammered the name he had been repeating and received prompt and brusque assurance that this man was Father Callahan.

"You have papers for the bishop, you say?" broke in

the priest, after Billedeau's first few eager words. "Oh, you cannot see the bishop. It is quite out of the question."

"But I have come from Attegat all the way, my father. I have come because I know the poor people best. I bring the papers where they have signed their names—waking in the night to sign their names—and the tears are on the papers."

"You may leave what papers you have brought. I will lay them before his Right Reverence if the matter is anything for his eye."

But Billedeau, his trembling hand pressed against his coat where the packet was buttoned away, did not seem to understand.

The priest extended his hand and snapped his finger sharply.

"Give me the papers, I say—whatever they can be. It is my business to look after such matters."

"But only I, Anaxagoras Billedeau, of the long border —only I can explain what those names mean," quavered the old man, apprehensively clutching the packet. "I can point out the names to the great bishop. He shall understand them, then: this is Onesimé Tetreault, of the withered leg, who has come so many times for his dole to the little door of the barn; this is Basil Laliberté, who—"

"And what is this all about, my man? We are very busy here. Speak quickly. Is it a petition? For whom is this petition?"

"We ask for the good Père Leclair back again—it is Attegat who begs. I am the very humble man, good father. But you shall not think it is strange that I have been sent, for I know the people—I have been in all the homes."

Another priest had started to pass through the hallway.

He paused and listened with momentary interest, for Billedeau was sobbing his entreaties.

"Does he come from Attegat?" this priest inquired of Father Callahan.

"So he says."

"That's the northern parish where a little old priest has lost his head over some matter of local politics. He has been transferred. There's an end of it all. I don't remember the details. But it has all been settled."

He passed on with a swish of his cassock.

"You hear, my man! It has been settled. Yet you may leave your papers with me. Do you hear? You may leave your papers. They will be filed with the report of the case. However, nothing can be done. It is all settled."

Anaxagoras stared stupidly, agony and woe and doubt in his eyes.

"I have come the many miles. I have come all the way from the north to tell the bishop, to show the papers to him."

The burly priest was curt, but there was kindness in him. This humble messenger of the wistful eyes caught hold upon his sympathies. Had Representative Clifford been there to behold he would have had fresh faith in "a psychological instrument." But only for an instant!

"The bishop is not strong. Do you not know that he is a very old man? He is ill. We cannot disturb him with matters that have been settled. I am very sorry you have come so far on a useless errand. I say, you may leave your papers. That is all."

But the old man did not loose his hold on the precious packet.

"I must give them to him," he muttered. "I cannot go home and tell them I did not do my duty."

The priest's face hardened. He waited a few moments in cold silence.

Then he turned away. Anaxagoras looked after him without speaking or imploring, for the hopeful thought came to him that perhaps the priest was going to intercede with the great bishop. The father spoke to the acolyte and passed out of sight, his black robe dragging on his heels.

The acolyte opened the door.

"You are to go," he said. When the old fiddler stood motionless, he pushed him gently and repeated the command.

"I have not seen the bishop." There was a wail in his voice.

"You must not speak loudly here, my man. You cannot see the bishop. He is ill. Please go away quietly."

Without exactly understanding why his feet carried him away, the old man found himself on the outside of the broad door.

He had been dismissed, he had been sent away, and his packet was still where Representative Clifford had buttoned it! Ah, why should not so wise a man as the representative have known that poor Billedeau could not do the great deeds? That bitter thought whirled above all the other emotions that made the brain of the old fiddler dizzy. Sobs choked him, tears flooded his eyes. He staggered away into the bedlam of the street. The rush of humanity terrified him. The noises dinned his ears. Far away, between high buildings, he saw trees. He dragged himself in that direction like a stricken animal who seeks refuge by instinct. He understood trees; they understood him. He was homesick for trees, for the open. Oh, the weary miles between him and the blue St. John!

It was a park to which he came—a spacious, breezy, wooded vista where birds twittered and waters splashed from fountains. He hid himself away from the paths and sat down upon his bucket.

The lofty golden cross was still within the range of his vision.

So he must go back to far Attegat and tell his people that he had failed so miserably? He had been sent and had not accomplished. For all they had done for him in the years when they had received him at their boards he had returned nothing, eh?

He dashed the tears from his eyes. He stood up. He took off his faded hat.

"The spirit of old Acadia!" he murmured. "Where is that spirit in me, Anaxagoras Billedeau? Is it not there —deep underneath? Is it not there, the same as it is in Evangeline Beaulieu when I have seen her eyes shine and the soul rise up behind them? Yes, it is here. I will sleep under the trees. I will eat the crusts from my bucket. I will stay. I have been sent to see our great bishop. I have been sent to tell him of the poor people. Then, by Saint Xavier, I swear it! I *will* tell him!"

Ah, good Patriarch Clifford, and your old man's inspiration regarding "psychological instruments"!

XXI

THE JUDAS OF ATTEGAT

IN his own turn, Louis Blais discovered something about the instability of political fences!

He had craftily undermined the posts which Representative Clifford had set so solidly during his long years of incumbency; Attorney Blais had softened the political soil with the waters of race prejudice and had dug diligently with the thin trowel of falsehood. He felt certain that on the day of the legislative convention he could huff and could puff and blow that Clifford fence down. The river-valley echoed with the woe and wrath of the men who had been driven off the disputed lands. In the soil of that rancor Attorney Blais had dug his own post-holes. The fabric of his political fence seemed good.

But the high ones "outside"—as the border called the world—did not understand the politics of Attegat, nor did they bother to find out.

In the first place, the landowners had acted when their own interests suggested action: Clifford suffered.

Then the good bishop, incensed by what had been revealed to him by prejudiced word and pen, had taken this time to punish a priest who seemed openly disobedient. An act which is removed from the circumstances which modify it fails to appear in its true light. The bishop saw only the surface from a distance; unfortu-

nately he lacked the intimate and sympathetic knowledge that would enable him to judge rightfully the people and conditions of that far border of his diocese.

Blais was a young politician, an impetuous son of the people; he was not a sagacious politician, however. The priest opposed him. Blais obeyed the first impulse of resentment instead of pondering the second thought of policy; he threw that priest as far as he could.

Then Attorney Blais immediately got his first experience in the danger of a political boomerang.

Père Leclair, present in Attegat, was a bothersome proposition; but Père Leclair, away from Attegat, was a force which had flattened the Blais fences.

Present in Attegat in the flesh, Father Leclair could employ only word and precept.

Absent from Attegat, he had unwittingly left behind him imagination, grief, resentment; and these ghosts worked more effectually among the mercurial temperaments of the district than the direct agencies the little priest could have employed by his own personality.

Louis Blais came into his office, away from the maledictions of the people, and wrapped the drapery of his frock-coat about him and sat down to unpleasant thoughts regarding his political acumen.

There were the sullen, growling, dispossessed settlers left for the nucleus of his strength at the polls; but that grand rush for him, that enthusiastic rallying to protest against Yankee domination, that radical confederation which would overwhelm opposition and oust the old politician from the seat he had occupied for so long—Blais remembered what men had said to him when he had ventured to show his head, and he realized that the grand rush had been halted suddenly and disastrously. The

people were in a frame of mind to make him atone for the mischief he had wrought.

Young Attorney Blais sat in his office and scowled and muttered and pondered until twilight dulled the hues of the sky at which he gazed through the window. He welcomed the dusk. He rose and went out into the evening when the shadows lay deep in the street under the trees. He did not flaunt the tails of his frock-coat. He plodded somberly along until he came to the stone house of the parish priest. Somewhat timorously he turned in at the gate and Madame Bissette answered his rap—Madame Bissette who still remained at the stone house, for she was as much of a fixture there as the chimney which carried away the smoke from her cook-fire.

"Father Horrigan?" He stammered the words.

"He walks in the garden," she said, her eyes narrowing like the eyes of an old cat who had been pinched. "I tell you that only because I have to tell you that as the priest's housekeeper." She added, in the patois of the border: "But for myself I say 'Pig that rolls in mud! Long-tailed, foul bird! Slimy snail, dragging itself across paper and leaving lies behind!'" She slammed the door.

The aroma of a good cigar, the glow of its coal, directed the attorney to Father Horrigan, who strolled on the edge of the turf under the orchard trees.

"I am Louis Blais, the attorney, father. I wrote the letter to the Church authorities. So I thought I would come and see you."

Father Horrigan had his hands behind his back as he strolled. He did not change his posture, though Blais timidly put his own hand half-way out toward the priest. The cigar assumed an upward slant, and the father swung past and walked on. He came back presently and stopped in front of the young man. Blais looked up at the

straight brows and the hard eyes and did not find it easy to say any more.

"Yes, I have read the letter, Mr. Attorney. It was what might be called a letter with a purpose; the purpose was to help you get into the legislature."

"But it was not right for a priest to preach politics to the people from the pulpit."

"Nor for a candidate to use the Church for a political weapon."

"I thought the bishop ought to know, Father Horrigan. Now that you are here I hope you are going to understand who the true friends of the good cause are."

"I shall undoubtedly find out after I have been here for a time," returned the new pastor, dryly.

"I stand against the Yankees who are trying to destroy our children and steal their birthright. The Yankee school was doing that."

"Did you set fire to it?" asked the priest, with paralyzing bluntness.

It was cynical, almost brutal attack, and it left Blais without words. Father Horrigan puffed his cigar and regarded the attorney intently.

"You need not incriminate yourself—or your friends. Not now! Matters that are hidden and ways that are dark are revealed at last when the light has been turned on. I want to tell you this, Mr. Attorney! He who brings reproach on his friends or on his Church by acts which are prompted by his own malice and for his own ends is a wicked wretch, and punishment will surely come. Would you have it go forth to the world that our great Church opposes the education of the young—we who give so much for the sake of the children? We are jealous of our own rights, sir, but we are not enemies to good works."

The young attorney gasped without being able to voice retort. This masterful man who had come from "the outside" astonished him. Till then the provincialism of Attegat had hedged Blais. He had never taken broad views of great questions. He began to realize dimly that he was not the important figure he had dreamed that he was. He was not to be taken into the councils of the high ones, so it seemed.

"I am called successful in matters of discipline," stated the priest, softening his aspect slightly. "I do not desire to be too harsh with you, my son. But it seems that we have not known this parish of Attegat as we should have understood it. It thrived on love and simple faith in the old days of peace on earth. But it seems to have come on times when peace is ruffled by greed and general misunderstandings. So there has come a crisis in Attegat. We must put in the knife so that we may understand. It is painful, is it not? The priest who has been sent away was a good man who did not understand that love and meekness and humility cannot solve all the human problems. You cannot make a saint by piling up all the virtues unless you stick an iron backbone into the mass. We shall see here in Attegat. That is all, my son."

He resumed his march up and down the edge of the turf.

Blais was astonished, and he was not satisfied. He waited until Father Horrigan had completed a few turns.

"I think *I* am entitled to help, instead of that white-whiskered old Yankee who wants to sell out this district and run all those people," he cried, bracing his courage.

"What help?"

Blais hesitated a little while, but his resentment at the manner in which his espionage and his reports had been received made him bold.

"I am fighting for what the Church wants," he began. "You need not tell me the inside unless you are willing to—I am no man to pry. But if you don't back me—"

Father Horrigan tossed away his cigar when Blais began hotly. While the young man spoke he moved slowly toward him. He interrupted the attorney by clutching him suddenly by the collar and shaking him until Blais danced on his tiptoes. Then the militant son of the Church propelled his visitor, brawny hand twisted in the fabric of the frock-coat, around the corner of the stone house and into the highway.

"You'd better run," the priest suggested, when he loosed his captive. He gave Blais a push. "I'm generally successful in matters of discipline, but sometimes I fail to control my own self."

The attorney did not run as directed, but he hurried.

He did not understand at all. His little mind had been made dizzy by this answer to his overtures for help. With the suspiciousness of small natures he convinced himself that some strange, deep plot had been hatched in high quarters, and his mind picked at the outside of the thing like a monkey at a hard nut.

He met no one on the street; and he was glad of that, for it seemed as though that coat had been permanently humped by the clutch of the priest's hand. His cheeks burned, and his soul burned, too. He was in the mood to run amuck, to cut and slash. He felt that he had been used and thrown aside. He had essayed to be the leader of his people; he had been manhandled like a school-boy caught at stealing apples.

So he trudged to his office; and on the outside stairs, sitting in the shadow, he found David Roi, who stated gruffly that he had been waiting.

Blais unlocked the door and they went in. The attor-

ney did not light his lamp. He stamped up and down the room in the dark, bursting with bitter words.

"You and I don't seem to be very solid with the priests," commented Roi, when he had understood the cause of this explosion. "It must be that we are pretty wicked, Louis. If we hit a priest we get hit back; if we help a priest we get hit harder. But I'm not here to talk of priests or politics."

"You've got to talk of both if you're going to talk with me now," raged the attorney. "There's a convention due here—and I'm going down to that next legislature."

"Where will you get the votes now?" asked Roi, with a half sneer. "You have kicked over your pail of milk, so all the boys tell me. Better give it up this time, Louis. Stay at home, and I'll put you in the way of as much money as you can steal out of politics."

"Oh, can you?" snarled the candidate, mocking Roi's sneer. He came to the table where Roi sat and beat a tattoo there with the flat of his hand. "I'm going to talk plainly to you, Dave. You may as well know it all. You know a lot about me. We'll make a clean sweep of the inside facts, as partners ought to do. Here's the point!" He gulped, for the confession came hard, even when he owned up to the scamp who squinted at him in the gloom. "The timber-land owners are behind me."

"But not in the same way they're behind the squatters, eh? A brad in one end of the goad for the squatters and a gold knob on the other end for you, Louis!" Roi laughed sarcastically.

"Why shouldn't I be with the timber-land owners? They have the law behind them. If men have been fools

enough to squat on land that doesn't belong to 'em they ought to expect to take the consequences."

"Oh, I don't propose to argue the thing with you, Louis! Go ahead on the job. I'll only say, as somewhat of a renegade myself, that you belong at the head of our class. Don't get mad. Take it as a compliment."

"I take it as an insult—but no matter. We can't afford to fight, Dave. If I'm in the legislature I can handle this district so that the land men can get by in this thing without a big uproar and a scandal. The squatters have got to get off those lands and stay off. That's a sure thing. I may as well be in on the deal and make a dollar. The people won't be any worse off. I'm worth money to the timber men. They realize it. They are willing to pay. I have got a good slice of money already. I can't lie down now, Dave. Let me get up there to the legislature and I can do a whole lot of hushing for the sake of the land men. I'm one of the Acadians, ain't I? My word about conditions up here will go a long way. It all means big money, Dave, and I'm after it."

"I always supposed they had old Clifford in their pay," remarked Roi.

"I see my campaign talk has got into your system as it has into other chaps," said Blais, chuckling. "I think I did a good job in that line. But I'll tell you confidentially, Dave, the old fool never took a dishonest cent. He don't know enough to get in with the bunch. They have tried to handle him before now. That's the reason the big men want to sidetrack him for this session. He'll go down there and be sassy, and he may be able to get folks to listen to him. The timber-land owners have got a hint that he's fumbling around now with some kind of a fool scheme for squaring the settlers on this land deal—

and if the people are squared it means that the owners lose. The mallet is out for old Clifford."

"But the handle seems to be cracked," suggested the smuggler, still satiric. He did not appear to take Blais's troubles seriously. "Have they left it to you to give him the knockout blow?"

"Thousand devils! they can't show themselves in the thing," cried the attorney. "They left it to me. I told them I could handle it. I thought I had fixed it."

"Young men are always too certain—especially when they have been wasting their time in school," drawled Roi. "I am older than I look. I have been outdoors on the border."

"I can't go to 'em now and own up that I have messed the thing—that I can't carry this district. I've got to win."

"You proposed to win by working your mouth instead of spending the money your crowd gave you. That's another bad mistake, Louis. It's all right to fool the farmers, but you shouldn't try to hold out on the boys. I've been keeping an eye on you, and I've been guessing some of this. I've got money enough of my own. But I don't want to see the boys trimmed. Let the farmers keep on holding the empty bag you've passed to 'em. But you can't treat the boys that way. Now own up! You need my help—you need the boys, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm willing to turn a trick to help the boys; and I'll be reasonable with you, for at the same time I'm going to do a little something for myself. My old father used to know how to handle a border caucus in the days when politics was hot up this way. I've had some good lessons, Louis. So when I say cash in advance you will understand that I'm not taking money under false pre-

tenses. When they handed you your retainer it came in cash, didn't it?"

The attorney growled an affirmative.

"Then dig up! Lay down five dollars for each man—day's wages. I'll bring one hundred across the border. Lay down another hundred. That's a dollar for each man for his supply of white rum. You see, I'm going into the items of the account with you, Louis. No flim-flam here. You put in the money for what you want done on convention day. I'll put in the time for what I want done. We'll just about strike a balance."

"What are you going to do with that hundred men—for me, I mean?"

Blais, though new in politics, had a general idea of what this incursion would mean, but he wanted to be fully in the know, as employer.

"Why, it simply means that a hundred good men will be on hand to see that the polls are kept open and the ballots pure—that a lot of ringers are not run up to the ballot-box by that old fox of a politician, your friend Clifford."

He paused a moment.

"A wink goes with that statement, Louis. But it is too dark here in this room for you to see a wink. So I will talk plain: I will post those hundred men around the door of the polling place, and they will simply crowd together and make elbowing through to the ballot-box mighty hard work for any man who doesn't come vouched for and carrying a Blais ballot. It's the good old trick my dad used to work. It's effective. It isn't riot. It isn't intimidation. It's an interested crowd of spectators—and there are no policemen up this way!"

"But the other crowd may start something—they have been pretty well stirred up!"

"Then all the blame for a disturbance at the polls will be laid on Representative Clifford's crowd. But there won't be much of a disturbance," stated Roi, a rasp in his tones. "The boys I team chaw red meat with plenty of pepper sauce on it. The men on this side of the river who are really mad are your men, the chaps who have been crowded off their lands. I reckon you can depend on them to come to the polls and vote against 'a white-bearded old Yankee who has sold out to the timber-land owners and has let this trouble come upon them!' That last is quoted. It's an extract from one of Blais's speeches. You and I know Acadians! The rest of the crowd will be made up of those men who have been bawling and lallylooing about Père Leclair's transfer. You will never see that bunch getting together and rushing a gang of my boys for the sake of having the chance to drop a ballot for a Yankee they suspect—thanks to what you've been telling them. Therefore, Louis, if you really want to make good with your people and go to the legislature, count out the coin. You should have done that in the first place instead of working your mouth so much. Straight-arm work is my idea. You have got all tangled up in your own plots."

He banged his fist on the table, as though he had marked a blunt period to that subject.

"Now, what about my sweetheart, Evangeline? Have you been watching her, Louis?"

"She is at her school daytimes and at Madame Ouillette's the rest of the time," returned the attorney, not relishing this summary dismissal of his own business. "Now about the caucus! If I—"

"Damn your caucus. It is settled—it is carried!" blurted Roi, with a flirt of his hand above his head.

In his turn he began to pace the room. He kicked

against a chair in the darkness. He flung the offending furniture away with an oath.

"I say straight-arm work is what counts. I'm going to turn a trick myself, Louis. It will be a trick that can't be spoiled by a fluke and a pack of hound dogs. By the gods, I would have killed that customs sneak before now if I hadn't got something better up my sleeve for him. You leave it to me, Louis, when I hate a man as I hate that whelp, I've got something waiting for him that will tie his eternal soul into a bow-knot. You wait. You listen. It will drop when I get ready to have it drop. But it has got to ripen and drop itself. No, I won't tell you! I'm done taking advice from you. You planned that other thing, didn't you? And what happened? I'll run this myself. I can wait to get Aldrich where I want him. But I can't wait any longer where that girl is concerned. You can have that bunch of men for your caucus, but when that caucus is over they'll do a job for me."

"Do you mean you're going to make a break for the girl and carry her away?"

"Just that, exactly."

"It will be a pretty rank job, Dave."

"I don't care—not that!" He clacked his finger into his palm. "It has been rubbed into my hide in good shape—I'll proceed to rub back. Evangeline is going along with the man she belongs to, and if any one gets underfoot he'll get stepped on."

"Will old Vetal show up?"

"Probably not." The smuggler had hesitated a moment before he answered.

"It will take considerable of the curse off it if he is on hand," insisted the attorney. "You can do a lot of dirt on the border, Dave, if you've got the men behind

you, but there's no use in piling on agony just for the sake of making rough-house."

"Beaulieu won't be here—that's settled!" There was queer restraint in Roi's tones. "I'll talk to you later, Louis, about something I'm not ready to talk about yet awhile. Just now I'm simply giving you the tip that I'm going to grab a good opportunity. Evangeline Beaulieu belongs to me. I'm going to have her."

"Her money belongs to you, too, when you get her," suggested the attorney, with vivid recollection of the will he had drawn. "I don't blame you for going after her strong, Dave, but you've got to remember that your hundred men won't be the only men in the village of Attegat on convention day—and Acadians will fight for a woman when they won't fight for politics. You'd better go at it another way," he pleaded, his fears for his own affairs prompting him more than any consideration for the girl.

"I have tried the other way. The sneak job didn't work. I know an opportunity when I see one. Now, Louis, dig up that coin. I want to be out of here."

Blais drew the curtain, lighted a small lamp and opened his safe. He counted off bills with the reluctance of a poor man who fingers money in amount for the first time.

"Seeing that you're proposing to get the girl and cinch all of Beaulieu's money by the same job, you ought to share expenses, it seems to me," he growled, pausing in his counting.

"Oh, stolen money is easy money. Hellions, like my men, work best for that kind of money. If you want my goods you've got to pay for 'em, Louis."

He stuffed the bills into his pocket after Blais had grudgingly counted down the last one.

"It's a great game, Louis," he said, jeeringly. "I'll

bring my wife down to the State Capitol and hear you make a speech on the prospects and progress of our glorious Acadia under the new deal which the kind owners of the timber-land are giving the people."

He hurried away and left the attorney gloomily counting the remainder of the money he had taken as the price of the betrayal of his kin and neighbors.

XXII

THE THREAT OF THE SINISTER HUNDRED

VEN the birds who sang matins in the trees which bordered the highways and lanes of the broad parish of Attegat knew that this day was not like other days.

The rumble of wheels, the patter of hoofs, the creak of harness, and the rattle of whiffletrees had sounded early in the gray dawn in the remoter sections of the district. The birds had been awakened. Swaying buckboards, heavily loaded with men, passed under the boughs. Voices chattered or mumbled.

Nearer to Attegat village, where roads converged and the lanes made union with the main highway, the rising sun lighted the way for many wagons loaded with many men. One after the other the conveyances swung into line as they met here and there, and when the main street of the village was reached the buckboards were strung along in steady procession.

Men came trudging into the hamlet, dusty men from far farms, who joined others on the way and formed groups of plodders.

The buckboards stretched long tails into the street where the horses were hitched to the gnawed posts, and men sifted among the vehicles, talking earnestly.

It was no gay convocation, this flocking to the legis-

lative convention of Attegat. The faces were serious; the tones were low.

Norman Aldrich, in his room under the rafters of the old tavern, was awakened early by the stir in the streets. He had arrived late at Attegat the evening before, after a tour of duty along the border—a fortnight of tense activity that had produced comforting results, viewed officially, for he had turned over to the United States deputy marshals a half-dozen sullen smugglers. He felt that he had earned the privilege of attending the Attegat convention.

His window looked out upon the inn's courtyard. He heard the voices of men. One voice was loud, insistent—the voice of a braggart, a hateful voice. Its timbre stirred vague resentment in the officer. When he peered down through the dingy glass of his window he understood why that tingle of anger had thrilled him: the lawless son of old Blaze Condon was the center of the knot of men. He was passing a bottle, insisting profanely that no man could afford to slight his hospitality.

Aldrich's first indignant impulse was to rush down and collar the rogue who had ambushed him and who now was impudently venturing on United States territory. But, after he had scrutinized Condon's companions, prudence suggested more wily measures. Those companions were not men of Attegat; Aldrich was sure of that. They were of another type; they were plainly men from the Province. The officer knew the men of the border well enough to discern their character as well as their habitat. He had seen such men before—reckless, swaggering men from the woods and hidden clearings, men from the high hills east of the St. John. They were of the sort that David Roi captained when he needed help for his exploits.

Aldrich hurried with his toilet, worried, wondering, apprehensive. Those swashbuckling aliens did not promise a comfortable element for the side-lines of a political meeting.

He found more of the same ilk in the big room of the tavern when he went down-stairs—men who bawled coarse remarks and laughter after him when he passed through on his way to his breakfast.

While he was eating he saw several buckboards halt in the yard; and more of those outsiders alighted and were hailed boisterously by their friends. Under the coat-tails of all of them bottles bulged prominently. It was plain that intimidation and interference were to play their part at the Attegat convention!

Aldrich, out of his meager knowledge of politics, had built much on the revulsion of feeling in Attegat, on the reawakened loyalty to Father Leclair. He had ridden through the night seeking names for the petition; he had heard the people voice laments and swear to obey the good priest and follow his advice. He had been sure that only the surly and the rebellious would stand behind Blais at the polls. He knew that there were not enough of these to nominate the demagogue. He had even indulged the fond hope that out of Clifford's sagacity the affair of Père Leclair had been settled, and that the priest would be present this day as mediator between the factions. He had been tempted to rap upon the door of the stone house the evening before, when he passed that way, and ask for news—perhaps shake the hand of the little priest! Clifford had been so confident; the bishop was certainly a good man, and he would understand this humble petition from his loyal people of the north! Aldrich, while he had ridden the border, had allowed his optimism to whisper all this comfort in his ear.

But when he saw what sort of men were sifting into Attegat every few minutes he realized that his optimism had taken refuge in flight on the back of the dove of peace!

In the long street he found many of the honest citizens of the district—habitant farmers with the fuzzy gray clothes of homespun, bateau-men with gaudy jackets of wool, choppers with belted waists and checkered shirts, but sprinkled among them were the sinister strangers. Such men had filtered through the groups of citizens when the fire had destroyed the big school; Aldrich, with bitter apprehension, feared that on this day they had brought fire-brands of another nature with which to put the torch to the tinder of Acadian temperament.

As he stood studying the moving groups one of the strangers lounged up and stopped beside him. The man gave Aldrich a disquieting sidelong stare from the corners of his eyes and spoke through the corner of his mouth.

"Where is Vetal Beaulieu?"

The officer checked an impulse to return a hot word, and replied, stiffly: "I would like to find out where he is myself. I have been hunting for him for some weeks."

"So I have heard. But where did you leave him—that is to say, what was left of him?"

'See here, my man, whoever you may be, I tell you I have been trying to find Vetal Beaulieu! His place is locked. It has been locked for some weeks. I have been there several times. I was there for the last time day before yesterday. The door has not been opened since I was there a fortnight or more ago. There! I have told you what I know. Suppose you return the compliment. Why do you come to me asking about Vetal Beaulieu?"

"Because I believe in asking the man who knows." The fellow leered at Aldrich and swung away.

The air and the tones were full of insult. Aldrich stared after his questioner wrathfully. Another man strolled up and plucked him by the elbow.

"Where is Vetal Beaulieu?" he asked, in a whisper.

"Confound your impudence!" blazed the officer. "How should I know where Beaulieu is?"

"You ought to know. The talk was made in the open. The border knew it. It was either you or him! And *you* seem to be healthy."

This man went on into the crowd before Aldrich could stop him.

While he was still muttering his resentment a third stranger accosted him, bending his face so close that he puffed fumes of liquor into the officer's nostrils.

"Where is Vetal Beaulieu?"

Aldrich caught the man by his coat lapels.

"What do you mean?"

"I owed him money that he didn't collect. If I knew where you left him I'd spend that money in flowers and decorate the place."

The man struck away the restraining hands with a vicious blow and went into the throng, laughing.

This persecution, astounding, mysterious, ominous, was proving as shocking as it was exasperating.

The officer noted that the bystanders were surveying these low-voiced colloquies with increasing interest. He strode away. But before he was out of the tangle of men and teams in the village street he was accosted by three other men who asked the same question and escaped with celerity. He was too angry to make further retort.

When he was beyond the houses of Attegat he turned off the highway and took the path across the fields toward the dwelling of Representative Clifford. He was eager for news regarding the affair of Père Leclair. He was

anxious to inform the patriarch of the presence of the sinister strangers in the village.

Since early light the old man had paced the creaking boards of his narrow porch, pausing as he made the turns, listening, gazing off into the glowing morning under the curve of his palm.

His gloom lightened only momentarily when Aldrich appeared; his air of anxious expectation settled upon him once more.

When the officer asked him for news of Père Leclair he walked away to the end of the porch. He returned presently and spread out his gaunt hands; they were speckled with age, and the thin flesh was stretched over the bones as cloth is stretched upon an umbrella's ribs.

"I have been indexing and codifying old age, as I have walked here, my boy; I have been preparing a digest of the human nature of an old man. An old man hates to quit the game of life. If he has had power he doesn't want to give it up. But as an old man's hands get weak he tries to make himself believe that his head is getting stronger. An old man's mind takes wider flights, for some of the grosser bonds of the body have been cast off. So an old man fools himself by thinking that he is getting wiser, when all the time he may be incubating lunacy in that old white-thatched noddle. An old man is devious, artful, goes the long way about to get at a thing, for he can no longer leap over obstacles and climb hills of difficulty as he could when he was a young man. God pity the old man when he wakes up and realizes that the long way about in the race of life is the loser's way."

He set his back wearily against one of the porch supports.

"I sent Billedeau away with those petitions to the

bishop. I wanted the bishop to see one of these fellows, one who was fresh out of the bush—I wanted the bishop to realize what children these people are, and I figured that, as a fair and a keen man, he would tell himself that the poor folks of the border should not be judged by the hard-and-fast rules he may apply to the rest of his parish. I sent a psychological instrument, Aldrich! An old man's devious dodge around by the longest way! Not a word from Billedeau! Not a word from the bishop! No sign of Father Leclair, and here is this convention hanging like a black cloud in the sky to-day ready to burst! I've got the votes—I'm sure of that. But the other side has got fists and ugliness and I'm afraid of what may happen."

"So am I, Mr. Clifford," affirmed the young man, soberly. "That crowd down in the village there is dusted with thugs from across the border. They show up as plainly as pepper on potatoes—mighty black-looking grains."

"I have even been to that new priest, Father Horrigan, Aldrich. I appealed to him to take some helpful attitude in this matter and smooth the situation. He told me that he had been sent up here to cut this parish out of politics. He may be right from his standpoint, but this parish isn't like any other parish. It's a regular Siamese-twins situation just now. The whole proposition is bound together by flesh and blood. Time and skill and patience could separate the elements and put us right. But this is no time to sink the knife in. It means blood, my boy —blood and no cure!"

The officer's face was grim and his eyes grew hard.

"You told me a few weeks ago that Blais would probably sell out to the timber interests. I believe that he has done so already, Mr. Clifford. I got some pretty

straight information while I was down the border. He went south and met the field agent of the syndicate."

"He's a crook. I know what he'll do if he carries that convention," the patriarch burst out.

"As far as I'm concerned I don't propose to see him carry it, sir."

"I'm afraid you've got to respect your job and take about the same position as Father Horrigan, my boy. This is politics—all politics!"

"It's something more, sir. The thing came to me as I was crossing the fields just now. One of the leaders in that gang back there is Condon, and he is subject to arrest for his attack on me. Every one of those plug-uglies, so far as I could see, is a smuggler with the goods on him. Do you understand? Each one of them has a bottle of Province liquor under his coat-tails. I am authorized to summon and swear in a special posse of United States deputies when need arises. If those men interfere with that convention I'm going to drop on 'em with my men—and I'll have plenty of able-bodied chaps at my back. And the United States government will sanction everything we do, Mr. Clifford."

"I haven't any right to win out by asking my friends to take blows for my sake," protested the representative.

"The people of this district have the right to insist that you stand as a candidate and rescue them from a rogue," stated the officer.

He went on passionately: "I have decided that this is no time to be squeamish. I can justify my action in case inquiry is made. It is time to show the renegades of this border that they are not running things. I'm human—pretty much so. I've got a few debts to pay—so have other honest men in Attegat who have been abused in the past by these fellows from across the line. They

are over here in our dooryard, and they've got to take the consequences. See here, Mr. Clifford, my blood has been boiling ever since I stepped out of the tavern this morning! Man after man of that gang sneaked up to me and whispered an insult—a dirty slur that I can't understand. If I have good luck before night I'll make those fellows swallow their own dose, even if I have to mix their teeth with it."

The old man surveyed this sudden fury with frank astonishment. He decided that his own political affairs constituted only a portion of the controlling animus of that day.

"No, I don't understand," continued Aldrich. "They asked me if I knew where Vetal Beaulieu was—where I had left him—what I had done with him! It was said with a sneer. Those men have been instigated to persecute me. It's a Dave Roi trick. That's plain."

Clifford hesitated only a moment.

"I have no doubt that it is Roi's silly work. Evangeline Beaulieu came to me and showed me an anonymous letter of the same purport."

The officer spat an oath viciously. Sensible comment on that unspeakable act was beyond him.

"Don't let the thing trouble you, my boy. Evangeline treated the contemptible thing properly—she told me it would be an insult to mention the letter to you."

Aldrich's soul came to his eyes and softened them.

"Beaulieu must be at home," suggested the patriarch.

"No, he is not at home. His place has been closed for several weeks. I have been searching for him."

"Then he is hiding for a purpose, my boy. This petty business of the letter and the curs sneaking up to you in the village to-day shows their hand. Keep your temper, and they'll quit. Yes, Aldrich, look out for your temper

to-day. I don't like the sound of this talk about a posse. We're in the right—and I hope God is going to send us another kind of help."

He gazed away across the fields once more, somberly, anxiously.

Aldrich did not comment.

"I will see you in the village before the convention opens," he informed the patriarch. "I'll not go out hunting for trouble, Mr. Clifford. I'll try to guard my temper."

He hurried away.

He did not return straight to the village. A lane allowed him to make a detour toward the big hill on the slope of which was Madame Ouillette's cottage. He glanced at his watch. He had been up and about early that morning; it was not yet the hour at which the school assembled on the hilltop.

He found Evangeline behind the little arbor in the madame's garden; she was arranging her bouquet for the master's table.

Aldrich drew her to him and kissed her, for his emotions were tumultuous at that moment; tenderness and sympathy strove with the passion of his love. His affection did not avail to avert that constant persecution, and this thought made his greeting of her as wistful as it was joyous.

He did not profane that meeting by reference to the slander of the letter. Her own attitude he understood from what Representative Clifford had said regarding the affair.

"I have tried again to find your father, dear," he told her. "He has not come home. I will try again."

"The happy thought has come to me that he is sorry," she said, gazing up at him trustfully. "So he has barred

the doors of the wicked place and has gone away to make himself right with our God. He will come back, Norman, and will understand us better."

They could look down through the trees from Madame Ouillette's garden and see the moving groups in the long street and hear the dull murmur of far-off voices. In the distance, along the highway and here and there on the branch roads, banners of dust signaled the approach of more wagons.

"It is the day of the great convention to choose our representative; I am sure the people will speak again for Monsieur Clifford," she said, after they had looked down in silence for a time. "We have been talking much of this day at the school. Master Donham says that we are to lead the children down the hill, and they will sing their songs to the voters and cheer for the good man who has brought the school to Attegat."

"No, the children must not come down the hill today," he protested, his face paling. "Take that word to the master, Evangeline. Make it a very emphatic word. If you do not think he will accept that message through you, I must go myself. The children must not come to the village. And, above all, do not come yourself—do not allow any of the teachers to come."

She stared at him in surprise, for he was earnest to the point of appeal. He had suddenly become somber and formal, and the tenderness had gone out of his eyes.

"But we can do much, so Master Donham believes. The hearts of the people have been softened. They are sad because Père Leclair has been sent away. They will rally now for Representative Clifford, for he has always been the good friend of the father."

"I insist! The children must not come. This is not a whim, dear. I cannot tell you all just now. There—

there—will be danger. It is politics," he went on, lamely, for her grave eyes were upraised and were searching his soul.

"And you will be there?" she asked.

"I must be there. I have business there."

"What is the danger?"

He replied with constraint in voice and demeanor.

"I cannot explain to you now, Evangeline. I should not have said so much! But I wanted to make you understand that on no account are the children or the teachers to venture into the village this day. Come! I will walk to the top of the hill with you. I think I'd better say the word to Master Donham so that he may understand."

He took her bouquet from her and followed her through the gate. As she walked beside him she studied his grave face with anxious intentness.

"There will be danger—and you will be there?" she repeated, at last.

"I have duties that take me there, Evangeline."

"I am not afraid of danger if I am with you, whom I love. I was not afraid on that night when you came to save me."

"You are the bravest woman I have ever known; but you must remain on the hill to-day."

His tone was imperative—it did not reveal his passionate desire to fold her in his arms. He turned his eyes away from hers, doubting his self-control.

When they arrived on the hilltop he drew the master into a tent, explained the situation tersely, and enjoined secrecy.

"I fear it will be a high price that we pay for the true good of Acadia," commented the schoolmaster, dolefully.

The officer did not trust himself to go to Evangeline

when he left the tent. He waved his hand to her and tried to smile comfortingly. But he realized that the smile was a miserable failure, for her sincere gaze had wrested from him whom she loved an answer to her forebodings; he had told her mutely that bitter trouble lay ahead of Attegat that day.

XXIII

ATTEGAT IN BATTLE ARRAY

WHEN Norman Aldrich came into the village square he found a situation which confirmed his fears.

No longer were the alien bullies scattered in the throngs which had flowed slowly along the street, eddying into groups and knots. The strangers had massed by themselves in front of Attegat's little town-house. Hulking fellows were crowded on the steps of the building; broad shoulders barred the narrow doorway. There was no mistaking the intent or the determination of that gathering.

Hovering on the outskirts of the crowd, dismay, doubt, and disgust wrinkling his sallow face, Notary Pierre Gendreau tiptoed nervously. He peered into the faces of these strange men; he made half-hearted attempts to penetrate the throng; he walked to and fro, twisting his hands and cracking his knuckles.

He hurried to Aldrich when the young man appeared.

"These are not lawful voters of Attegat, Monsieur. They have come from across the border. They obstruct my way. I am to be chairman of the meeting. They show no respect. They block the door. I have been chairman of many meetings, but I have never seen such disregard of the rights of others."

"You had better walk along with me, Notary Gen-

dreau," advised the officer. "The convention cannot be called together just now."

Aldrich glanced up at the window of Blais's office. He saw David Roi, obvious and insolent captain of these rogues, commanding from this vantage-point. Aldrich was sure that cowardice had more to do with this isolation than a captain's tactics.

The old notary followed the young man out of the crowds. Men plucked at the notary's sleeve and asked anxious questions, but he shook his head and plodded on. He did not know how to advise the voters in this amazing crisis. Men ranged themselves in the square in long lines and stared sullenly at these interlopers who usurped the rights of citizens. Without wholly realizing what they were doing, the men of the crowds were separating into the factions which the passions of that day had formed. There were three elements. The bullies had already flocked and had taken their position. The malcontents of the river-valley—the evicted squatters and those who sympathized—drew out from the press of other men. The law-abiding voters, the friends of Clifford, the loyal and remorseful parishioners of Père Leclair, gazed wonderingly and apprehensively, realizing that they were in the presence of foes. Many followed the officer and the notary, for these were known to be supporters of Representative Clifford; the voters wanted to understand what this sinister preparation meant and what was expected of them.

Therefore it happened that Aldrich was leading quite a little army of anxious citizens when he met Clifford at the edge of the village. He had walked in that direction for the purpose of intercepting the representative.

"It is as bad as it can be, sir. Roi has at least a hundred of his renegades in the village, and they have blocked the door of the town-house."

"Mauvais sujet!" muttered the notary to the men who flanked him. "But shall the word go out that we allowed that canaille to come here across the border and run our convention? No, I think French blood will not endure that!"

"Representative Clifford, they don't intend to allow enough of our voters to get to the ballot-box to-day to carry this thing for you."

"Let them go ahead and nominate Blais. I'll protest his nomination; I'll expose this infamy; I'll keep him out of the legislature," declared the old man. "I have been thinking the matter over, my boy. If we stay on the side of the law we can invoke the law."

"Let me tell you this, Mr. Clifford," said the officer, leading the representative out of earshot of the goggling bystanders. "I thoroughly believe that Blais is working for the timber-land owners and has their influence behind him. And in that case we will be fighting men in the law who have plenty of money to buy lawyers and witnesses. If Blais is nominated at this convention he'll have all the nine points of possession. Don't think I'm too hot-headed in this matter. I don't relish quarrels. But I believe this is a case where might is justified in making the right."

The representative rubbed his nose reflectively.

"I'm afraid you're two-thirds right about what the law can do to us in court, Aldrich," he admitted. "If we make no effort to carry the convention they've got a better story than we have, for there cannot be testimony then as to violence. We can only tell about loafers at the polling place. If we make an honest effort to carry the convention, then there'll be a devil of a row. I've got a good mind to go and climb one of these trees and pull it up after me," he added, disgustedly.

"Wait and let me climb something that's more to the point," said Aldrich. "The nub of all this trouble is up there in Blais's office, sir. We may as well have an understanding with those knaves before we start in. So I propose to climb those stairs and let them know what to expect unless they keep their hands off to-day."

He walked away alone. The representative, the notary, and the huddled group of their supporters stared after him.

"I don't know which is best, Notary Pierre—the young man's 'I will!' or the old man's 'I wait.' It's a pretty old question, and this doesn't seem to be a very good day for debating it."

"I think it's a good day for Attegat to show that she can run her own legislative convention. I have been chairman many years, and she has always run her affairs well and honestly," declared Gendreau, beating a thin hand on the breast of his shiny frock-coat. The passion of troublous times, of offended dignity, of civic pride, glowed in his deep eyes. "I am not a young man any longer. But I wish I were."

The officer walked across the square, straight toward the office, raising his eyes to the window in a fashion that left no doubt as to his intentions. He met the gaze of Roi and saw the smuggler brandish his hand in a sudden signal.

While he was mounting the stairs he heard the thud of running feet in the square behind him, and turned at the sound of clatter of boots on the stairway treads. Several of the alien bullies were following him. The significance of Roi's motion was revealed. The coward was summoning a body-guard.

The men were at his heels when Aldrich went into the office. He did not stop to argue or protest. He had neither time nor words to waste.

Blais stood near the door, and his countenance displayed varying emotions: uneasiness predominated, and sullen hatred was there. But Blais was no longer the self-assertive blade who had shouted inflammatory sentiments of race from his window over the gilded sign. Consciousness of his guilt as would-be betrayer of his people made him shrink before this stalwart and keen-eyed young man who was in the way of knowing more of the secrets of the Yankee timber-land folk than the simple *habitants* of the border could gather. It seemed to the attorney that the visitor threatened and accused him by the stare he delivered as he swung in through the doorway. Blais glanced past Aldrich and blinked his relief at sight of the border swaggerers who came jostling in.

"You have some business this day with me, eh, Monsieur?" he asked, his perturbation making him forget the stilted English he assumed on occasions.

"I have, Attorney Blais."

"I do not do business to-day. I have no time to attend to the law to-day. I am a candidate. This is convention day."

"That is my business with you, sir."

Roi advanced from his post at the window. His men were at hand. He had a bully's courage when he was backed by numbers. He saw that Blais was confused and had lost countenance.

"It will be time for you to make the politics of this district your business when you get to be a voter here, *Mister* Customs Man," he sneered.

"The remark fits your own case exactly, Roi. I hand it back to you. And here is the way you're making politics here your business." He shook his fist at the men behind him.

"But I have the right to come into this office—I am the friend of Louis Blais."

"I'm here to show him that I'm a better friend than you are, Roi. You propose to help him commit a crime. You have advised him to do so. Blais, don't you know enough about law to understand what it will mean to you if you let those scalawags out there block that convention?"

The candidate muttered and walked to and fro.

"Are you afraid to let the legal voters walk to the ballot-box?"

Blais took refuge in anger.

"Let me tell you something you know already, Mr. Officer. How have the conventions been run in Attegat all these years? Ah, you know! A little clique has run them. Old Gendreau is always chairman. It is always all tied up for old white-bearded Clifford. Those who don't vote for Clifford are thrown out; they are called men who belong to another political party. They are told they cannot caucus with the other citizens. That's the way it has been run. It is time to have a change—yes, it is time to let men vote."

"It has been done in Attegat as it has been done in all other parts of the State, Blais. You know well that it is not right for men of other parties to come to a party caucus and vote. It has been much more liberal here than elsewhere, for nearly all the voters have been for Representative Clifford. You are not sincere when you talk that way. I am no child. Use man's talk when you talk to me."

"My friends will only see to it that I have a show against the ring that has run everything for so long," insisted the candidate.

Roi indorsed that statement with an oath.

"I have come up here to talk sense, Blais, not to quarrel and call names. All you've got to do is to look out of your window. The sight speaks for itself. A gang of strangers have taken possession of the town-house and are blocking the way to the convention. Aren't you willing to leave this to the ballots—to the voters?"

"I have been lied about—I have been abused behind my back. The voters were with me. They have been taken away by sneak tricks, by using Père Leclair. I was fighting fair. When the other side stops fighting fair I turn and I fight any way to win," confessed the attorney, vehemently.

"That's your code, is it? Then I want to warn you, Blais, that you can't expect the other side will take any higher ground. The show-down will come after it is all over. You'll have to admit that you tried to carry off this convention by force. The right side can prove that they merely resisted that force. The law will back Representative Clifford. You will be exposed; and here's what I've come to warn you about: you will also expose some big men who will turn on you and disown you and use all their influence to ruin and disgrace you so that they can clear their own skirts in this affair. I know the men; I know what I am talking about."

Aldrich had resolved to put his suspicions to the test. He wanted to reassure himself in his own position in this crisis, if possible. He attacked the subject boldly in order to jump Blais, if he were able, in order to find out from the rogue's demeanor just how far in turpitude the attorney had gone.

Blais was no master of guile; guilt was in his soul, and the consciousness of his betrayal of his race and of his league with Roi had already unnerved all the fibers of his being that day. He had even shrunk from the win-

dow from which he had declaimed so brazenly in the past. With pale face, shuttling eyes, cowed demeanor, he backed away from Aldrich.

The officer followed his first advantage boldly.

"The timber-land owners gave you money for buying votes, not for bullying voters! They won't stand for you making a scandal out of this thing, my man. They'll turn to and beat out your political brains. I say, I know the men and the way they operate when a fool puts them in wrong."

He had mastered his man. That blunt attack had made Blais remember what he had been trying to forget in his thirst for personal advancement, in his pursuit of the office he coveted so intensely: his employers had made secrecy the basis of their contract with him. In his folly, in his insane desire to win and deliver that which he had sold, he had taken Roi into his confidence. Now his secret seemed to be opened to the world. He put up his hands. In another moment he would have been groveling in surrender.

But Roi thrust him back into a corner, growling furious oaths in his ear.

Then the smuggler whirled on Aldrich.

"You'll answer for that lie in court. You've been talking about law! You'll get what you want. You heard what he said about my friend, men? Remember it—remember every word. You'll be called on to tell it in court. Your man is licked at the polls—you know he is licked, you customs sneak! So now you want to pull down a good man by slandering him, by threats to lie about him. But, by the gods, I'm here to see that he gets a square deal!" He pounded his fists on his breast.

"I see you're here," stated the officer. "And you're on dangerous ground. The United States wants you."

He stepped forward so suddenly that the smuggler had no time to dodge. He tapped Roi lightly on the shoulder. "I arrest you in the name of the United States."

For a pregnant instant Roi stared at the officer, looked beyond him in startled fashion to discover whether plot or ambush or reserves justified this bold declaration, and then, when he realized that Aldrich was alone and that half a dozen brawny thugs formed his own body-guard, he laughed.

"Arrest hell!" he jeered.

"I am detaining you for the United States marshals, according to the law, Roi," said Aldrich. "I have taken you on my side of the border."

"Well, what's the rest of it?" asked the chief of the border gang, winking at his men.

"The rest of it is that if, after your arrest, you resist and try to escape you'll get what I'm justified in giving you. Just understand that you're a prisoner."

"A prisoner—me?" Again he pounded his breast. "Why, you damnation dude, you! you'd have to have an army of your customs sneaks to arrest me to-day! I've got a hundred men here in this village—and there are some fair samples of the lot behind you there. Arrest me, eh?" He bawled his laughter more loudly as his assurance returned. "Did you see that terrible blow the dude gave me just now, fellows? Right on the shoulder as hard as he could strike! Isn't he the dreadful savage man, what? Better try to put me in my little cell, Mr. Officer, and then you'll find out what will happen to you."

But Roi's face flushed when Aldrich kept his eyes steady and hard, and his irony was plainly forced.

"I repeat, Roi, that you are a prisoner. Will you come along quietly?"

Had this been some other man Roi might have struck him blindly and insanely in his vicious rage. His features expressed passion sufficient to inspire the act. But the memory of the blow the officer's fist had dealt him once dominated him in his rage; and, though his men were at hand, he merely clacked his fists before his face and eased his feelings with oaths.

Aldrich held himself in check and on his dignity as an officer. He had come up into that room, into the presence of his foes, for a purpose. There would be a story to tell of that day—he was sure of that, for his mind was made up and he had resolved he would meet the issue of the day as he found it. As an officer he would need justification. Now he was laying the basis of that justification. In the past David Roi had been careful how he ventured across the border; he had come by stealth. He was an indicted smuggler for whom the marshals had been waiting with that patience which characterizes the government pursuit of offenders.

Aldrich still hoped that pitched battle might be avoided, even though that drastic alternative seemed better than surrender to the evil forces that would ruin progress, sap energy in the district, and destroy the hope that wise reorganization was about to prevail in the affairs of the people. He understood that he had taken most of the fight out of Blais. The attorney stood in the corner, hands rammed deeply into his trousers pockets, and was looking at Roi as one would regard a dangerous bomb which he feared to touch himself, but which he would like to see tossed over the rail.

"If you don't come quietly, Roi," Aldrich said, after waiting a few moments in ominous silence, "you must take the consequences."

"What consequences?"

"What the law of the United States allows!" cried the customs man, sternly. "This is no brawl, Roi. I'm an officer. I don't mean to say that I can take you with my two hands and drag you out of this room past those men of yours. This is not a time for cheap threats or arguments. I simply tell you that I have made you a prisoner—and the United States government has given an officer plenty of law for his use and protection." He did not intend to be too specific with this rogue; he noted that his self-restraint and his vagueness were already having their effect. Lower natures are intimidated more easily by what they do not fully understand.

"Come along!" commanded the officer.

"Not on your life!" blazed the smuggler. He had dropped his air of bragging banter. His coward's soul was restless under the stare of those hard, gray eyes.

"Very well! I have given you your chance." He turned away and walked to the cowering Blais. "I'll advise you to step to that window and tell the voters that you are not a candidate, sir. It will ease you out of a bad scrape. Don't let a scalawag, a prisoner of the United States government, advise you to your own hurt. If you haven't spoken to the people and withdrawn your name within ten minutes, I shall consider that you intend to let matters take their course. That's all!"

He determined not to prolong the interview. He felt that he had said just enough. He threw back his shoulders and walked toward the door.

The men allowed him to pass.

When he strode across the square and took his way back to where his friends were waiting, most of the voters who had split from the avowed rebels of the district hurried after him. Curiosity to know what had been happening up in Blais's office drove them at his heels. They

came crowding around when he joined Clifford and the notary, adding themselves to the group already there, pressing closely as men entitled to know what their leaders had accomplished, forming a mass which hedged the three principals on all sides.

Aldrich had decided to deal as openly with these simple men of Clifford's party as prudence justified. He raised his voice so that all might hear.

"I have been talking to Louis Blais, Mr. Clifford. I have been telling him some truths about himself and his position, and I think he appreciated those truths. I hope he is going to come to his window shortly and announce to the voters that he withdraws his name. I feel that we are all fair men on this side," he went on, meeting the gaze of the group frankly. "I told him we would wait patiently for ten minutes."

The patriarch did not ask questions. He squinted shrewdly at the officer and resigned himself to wait.

So they stood, their eyes on the window above the new gilt sign.

Silence held them. They heard the dull rumble of the voices of the bullies who still thronged in the doorway of the town-house. Occasionally the sunlight glinted on the glass of a bottle which was tipped to a drinker's lips. Occasionally a noisy laugh rattled out over the monotone of many voices. The horses in the square clumped down their shaggy hoofs, dislodging flies. The doves rustled and fluttered and cooed gratefully, picking up grain that dropped from the tossed nose-bags.

Aldrich drew out his watch. Resolve had deepened into bitterness, and he determined that action should succeed the threats he had made. The thought came to him that he would be placing his own reputation as an

efficient officer in jeopardy if he allowed Roi to perpetrate the lawlessness he proposed.

Then Blais came suddenly to the window and thrust out his head. His time of grace was not up.

He shouted and waved his hands, calling attention to himself. From his impetuous haste, his excited demeanor, the shrill tones of his voice, the officer drew quick and discouraging augury: Blais had been nerved again to contest; his was not the air of a man who intended to acknowledge failure.

"Listen, one and all!" he screamed. "Slanderers have threatened me. But I shall not be bulldozed, fellow Acadians. I stand for you. You must stand for me. Believe no lies. I am a candidate. I shall stay a candidate!"

The men at the door of the town-house cheered lustily; the voice of Condon hoarsely proposed a health; and the bottles were waved in the air.

For a few moments Aldrich remained, watch in his hand, his gaze traveling from the window to the massed forces of the enemy. He saw David Roi come down the stairs from the office, his men at his heels. The smuggler strode across the square and thrust himself into the heart of the press of his little army. For Aldrich that act stood as open and insolent challenge, manifest intent to barricade himself, as a prisoner of the government, behind the bodies of his lawless followers.

"That settles it, Mr. Clifford," he said, and he snapped his watch-case.

"Honest men of Attegat," he cried, addressing those who surrounded him, "that man, David Roi, is a smuggler whom I have just arrested in the name of the United States. He is defying high authority. You are citizens of the United States. I call on you to do your duty. Raise your right hands."

The hands came up, though wonderment was on their faces.

He swore them solemnly as special officers.

"Get weapons where you can—clubs, pitchforks, anything," he told his new posse. "The law is with you. Do not be afraid."

"But wait one moment, Aldrich," began the patriarch.

"I cannot listen, now," retorted the officer, curtly. "I must warn you, sir, that I shall resent anything which seems like interference with officers making an arrest."

He turned away from the appealing gaze of the two old men.

"I assume all responsibility—I am inside the law."

Representative Clifford, his features working with emotion, stared toward the south under the curve of his hand. He was like a prophet who had predicted, had hoped, had prayed, and at last had suddenly been told that hopes and prayers and earnest faith in that time of deep trouble were foolish and futile.

"My God," he muttered, "this is a time that needs something besides fists and clubs. It needs a soul from old Acadia. But Père Leclair isn't here!"

XXIV

THE JOAN OF ATTEGAT

THE sun smiled comfortingly on the little activities of the hilltop; the summer breeze caressed the waving grasses there and thrust unseen fingers in and out of the tresses of the maples and the beeches. Most of the teachers and the children were under the trees. The few tents were used for the housing of the tools of trades. Master Donham had gathered meager equipment by appeals to his friends "outside," while he was waiting for the fateful session of another legislature, hoping that those in the State's high stations would once more incline to the needs of Attegat, gathering his proofs and his arguments to lay before the men who should question Attegat's responsibility and gratitude.

Evangeline Beaulieu led her flock to a tree at the brow of the hill nearest to the village. She tried to resign herself to the duty that awaited her there; she tried to make herself feel that her lover had spoken wisdom to her, that his urgent commands should be obeyed. She knelt beside her little maids and steadied the stubby fingers that toiled with needle or wrought with pencil. But her eyes wandered from the tasks, and her ears were listening for sounds from the village.

When childish treble piped eager trials at Yankee speech, she heard ever and ever that dull rumble of

men's voices, and the growling monotone suggested some beast who lurked below there, under the trees, waiting to leap and rend.

She pondered anxiously on what Aldrich had said.

He had told her there would be danger. His eyes, his air had spoken to her as sincerely as his voice. He had meant that there would be conflict, clash of man against man, and defeat—defeat for one side; that must happen. Which side was threatened? She wished she had heard more news from the village that day! She had asked many questions during the past days; she understood the principles at issue. She knew what Representative Clifford stood for in the affairs of Attegat, in the hopes for the school, in the promise of better things for the poor people of Acadia when the great men should hear all the truth at last. All those matters were very near her heart.

But nearer than all others was that stalwart young man who had just gone away from her, trying to look confident and care-free, and failing.

In her distraction, her fears, her boding sense of evil, that knowledge thrilled her soul as she sat there in the little flock of peaceful children and harkened for those grim sounds from the crowded streets of Attegat.

One chorus of hoarse shouts snapped short the half-attention she had been giving to the stubby fingers, the childish treble.

She was on her knees among the pupils; the poor little school under the trees had not the luxury of chairs. Still kneeling, she looked up at the sky, her face white, her lips apart, straining her attention, listening, fearing more acutely.

If Anaxagoras Billedeau had been there to gaze into those upraised eyes he would have remembered what he had said—for Billedeau remembered always when he saw

the soul of old Acadia appear in the newer times. If Vetal Beaulieu had been there he would have seen once more that wondrous, compelling light from the deep spirit of womanhood which had swayed and had frightened him and had made him rage and ponder and weep the whole night long.

"My God, Dave Roi, when I look at her standing there she is not my girl any more. She is—I can't tell you what it is she is—but I am frightened when she look on me!" So had spoken Vetal Beaulieu.

"It is there—it is underneath—it is in the Acadian blood," Anaxagoras Billedeau had said when he saw that look in her eyes on the long road to the north. "It is most of all in the women."

And her lover, who understood her best of any, he had said: "The Maid of Orleans must have had that look in her eyes when the call came in the old days."

Out of the depths of her nature, as she knelt there among the children, came a power which dominated her. Out of troubled, anguished thoughts arose that impelling influence. She knew that men were met that day to settle a dispute which meant much to all the hopes of her people. The hateful Blais opposed the good and the right. He had shown joy instead of remorse when the big school was burned and the children were turned out-of-doors. She had seen his face that night. It was this man who had ruined Father Leclair, that saint in good works. Ah, where would the poor people be led if this false guide put himself before them?

So her swift thoughts ran.

Devotion called her spirit to arms.

The agony of love's fears wrenched her heart.

The mystery deep in her soul gave her will and strength.

She arose from among the wondering children and

walked down the hill toward the village. Her head was uncovered. Her dark hair was bound loosely, and the wind waved it upon her shoulders. She was erect, wide-eyed, and went swiftly.

She heard oaths when she came near the square. There were loud cries which signaled the preliminaries of conflict. She heard words of truculent invitation and shouts of defiance.

The mass of men in front of the town-house had lined in rough order of battle. They had produced stout cudgels, and those in the outer rows clashed these weapons, each against his neighbor's, in menacing fashion.

But it was plain that the opponents who were advancing across the square were not deterred by this bluster: patriotism has its clarion appeal—and these Frenchmen who had taken the vows of citizenship were patriots; they were the men of the valley who remembered the benefits Representative Clifford had brought north from the hands of their Yankee neighbors. They were men who had been made dizzy for a moment by the harangues of Louis Blais, but who had promptly recovered their sane senses. They followed Norman Aldrich courageously, their eyes shining as they glanced at the eagle on his cap, their mercurial natures suddenly hot for combat with these rascals who had rushed across the border to take away from them the rights their adopted country had given them.

The girl saw and understood. She began to run.

Between the factions she came so suddenly—unseen until the last minute—that she seemed like an invoked spirit of intercession.

She was an apparition; her gown of pure white seemed whiter by contrast with those dusty ranks. In her haste

her hair had fallen from its loose bonds. The men stared at her, blinking wonderment and admiration.

The men of Attegat knew her, and they were those who wondered; the hired miscreants of Roi did not know her, and their flushed faces showed the admiration that their wagging tongues tried to express.

Aldrich stopped in his tracks, astounded, aghast. His first thought was that she had come to search for him; he was about to cry out to her. But, though her eyes swept him as she took her stand between the lines of men, she did not address him.

This was no shrinking girl apprehensive for the safety of a lover!

He saw her transformed, as she had faced him once before, her eyes alight with the fires of her soul!

In the center of the square, near where she stood, was the platform of the village trough where sweet waters plashed and tinkled from their wooden spout.

She leaped upon the platform. She raised her arm, and the sleeve fell away from the rounded flesh. A hush, so profound that their stertorous breathing could be heard, fell upon them all. This girl of the unbound hair, the wide, flashing eyes, who had burst upon them so suddenly was an influence they had not expected; but they instinctively responded to it; they listened with open mouths and cocked ears for what she was to say to them.

She faced the crowding men who blocked the door. She knew the men of Attegat. These who massed at the door were not men of Attegat. But she recognized the type; she had seen them across the border at St. Basil. They were swarthy men—men of black beards or tall youths with dark eyes and a swagger of the shoulders. They were French Canadians, most of them. Her eyes told her that in an instant.

"Messieurs, I know your hearts, for you are of my race. I know you will listen to a woman."

She spoke to them in French. In that hush her low, vibrant, thrilling tones carried to every ear.

"I do not come because I want to meddle in great affairs, my gentlemen. I am only a poor Acadian girl who loves the good name of the men of her blood. I do not like to see men led astray by the few who desire ruin and wickedness, so that they may carry out bad plans to help themselves. Those men let others take the blows, and they take the profit."

She had seen the malevolent face of Dave Roi where he was intrenched among his supporters, and her woman's perception told her the reason for the presence of those strangers in Attegat.

"For a few moments here to-day you will be fighting men if you persist, Messieurs. But in the end it means fighting women and children. You are fighting the women who will be kept out of their homes on the disputed lands, if more trouble happens here on the border. You are fighting poor children who need an education. I look into your faces, and I do not think you are the sort who care to fight women and children. May not the men vote here as they feel they should vote for the women and the children? Will you fight and go away without blushing when you think of those who must suffer the most? I, an Acadian girl, appeal to you out of a full heart and from the depths of my soul."

She stretched out her arms to them, her beautiful face glowing with the earnestness of appeal, her voice trembling with the passion that was in her.

Ah, she understood those men of her blood; those Frenchmen whose volatile natures had not been crushed out of them by the wild life of forest and stream, who

"I, AN ACADIAN GIRL, APPEAL TO YOU FROM THE DEPTHS OF MY SOUL"

under all the ribaldry of border life preserved that Gallic gallantry, those manners of courtesy tracing back to the fathers, that spirit of quixotic fervor in the duty owed to a handsome girl.

They were Frenchmen!

Their eyes, upraised to hers, shone; their hats came off. Their potations had hardened them for battle with men. But these same potations mellowed them when a woman's tongue besought, when a woman's dark eyes met theirs, when a woman's cause was so unhesitatingly put into their hands.

"It's little I ask of you, good gentlemen. Only that the men of my blood and yours shall be allowed to put their votes in the box in their own village."

With her hands still outstretched she came down from the platform. She was heartened by their countenances, by their murmurs. She smiled on them trustfully.

The girl had noted where Representative Clifford and Notary Pierre had thrust themselves to the front of the loyal citizens of Attegat and were staring up at her with the aspect of men who were beholding a saint working a miracle. She went and stood between them, giving a hand to each. Then she led them toward the unbroken phalanx of the men who blocked the way to the town-house door.

The trustful smile was more sweetly radiant on her face. She shook back her dark curls, her chin tip-tilted, and showed them that face, flushed, entreating.

Some of the men began to thrust with elbows and shoulders. They growled at laggards. They threatened sullen rebels.

The way to the door was open!

She passed up the narrow lane of her converts, who stood with bared heads. She walked between the two

old men, the candidate and the chairman, holding their wrinkled hands.

She did not behold what happened at one side of the throng, though she heard the noise of it.

Roi had been swearing hoarsely at his men. He had plowed his way roughly among them, here and there, insulting them by word and prodding fist, inciting them to do his bidding.

At last he drove his hand with wicked venom between the shoulders of a sturdy riverman and spat a vicious taunt at him. That man, his face convulsed, his eyes red with sudden passion, spoke the thought that was then in the minds of the throng: "Damn your dirty soul! Do you think five dollars of your stolen money can hire me to fight a girl?"

A nastier taunt was flung at him by the infuriated employer. With an oath of protest he struck Roi full in the face, and the smuggler went down like a log. He struggled for a few moments among the legs of the men, and then crawled away on his hands and knees, shielded from observation as he made his escape. His horse was at the corner of the building. He mounted and galloped away. He understood then the new spirit of that crowd. It had been thirsty for a fight with men; it was just as ready to resent insult offered to a pretty woman.

Norman Aldrich did not note this escape of his prisoner. He was standing mute, motionless, stricken, gazing at Evangeline, his emotions swelling in his throat, his eyes brimming with tears, his love lifted to the holy height of adoration.

She paused at the door, gently pushed the two old men ahead of her into the building, and turned and faced them all once more.

"All my thanks to you, Messieurs! May my friends

come in?" Again that trustful smile illumined her face, the smile that took her race into her confidence.

A tall man stepped from the throng of the aliens and bowed, his hat on his breast.

"The polls are open, Mam'selle," he said. And the sinister hundred from across the border broke up into groups and left the way clear for the voters of Attegat.

"Let me tell you this, Notary Pierre," said the patriarch, as they mounted the rostrum of the town-house, "God knows His own business best. I have been blaming Him because I didn't hear from Billedeau. But I reckon that God kept Père Leclair away so that the girl His Providence sent to us could have a clear field."

XXV

A RAGGED FAIRY GODFATHER

SO, cowering in the midst of the city's ramp and rattle, Anaxagoras Billedeau waited!

Through weary days and anxious nights —messenger and martyr — chosen from all Attegat for that sacrifice, the dusty, tousled old fiddler waited—waited in tortures of doubt, in agony of hope, while his eyes sank deeper under their tufted brows and new wrinkles etched themselves across his cheeks.

O' days he crouched under his tree in the park and listened to the city's roar, furtive and fearing, like a forest animal at bay.

O' nights, though the hideous jargon of humanity was stilled, sounds more mystic, more portentous, heaved on the air from all about him—sounds his ears could not translate. But he had the instinct that belongs to the man of the open country; and he sensed something quivering about him like the vast respiration of a monster, and he leaned against the tree's shaggy bark and stared into the gloom and was afraid.

There were crusts in the bucket; there was water in the fountain. He ate sparingly, and he drank thirstily. He dwelt in the park as the swallows dwelt there, picking

at his crusts, drinking and laving his face at the fountain's brim.

When the east was flushed and he knew that the great doors of his church were open, he crept into the dim sanctuary and solaced his soul with humble prayer. Sometimes he dared to remain in his corner until the organ rolled its mighty tones through nave and transept, the diapason making the pavement quiver under his knees while the playful *scherzo* of the trilling notes winged high in the echoing spaces above him. He heard the distant voices of unseen singers and the dull drone of a chanting voice, and his soul thrilled with the mystery of devotion.

At such times he thought of the poor people of the valley of the St. John, and, though his eyes filled and his throat ached, new fervor of determination came over him.

He rose from his knees and went forth and trudged valiantly to the oak door under the *porte cochère*. Each morning when the tower clock marked the hour of nine he went to the bishop's door and beat on it with his fist. Each morning he was sent away. His dismissal was given through the crack of the door, for this persistent man with the solemn face and the sunken eyes and his everlasting quest of "the great bishop" seemed bent upon some sinister errand.

Behind the door there had been much talk regarding him among the diocesan subordinates. He brought papers from Attegat, he had told them. Very well, but why did he not leave the papers? Why did he not do as Father Callahan had requested? This insistence upon an interview with the bishop himself had a flavor of suspicious determination. There was disaffection in Attegat. Rumors had come from that far parish. There were grudges.

This man might prove to be a dangerous person if he were admitted to the presence of the diocesan head. He must be kept away. Perhaps it would be well to call the police if he continued this persecution. At all events, the bishop must not be informed of this desperate effort to enter. The bishop was old, and he was not well, and such bodeful persistency might worry him. So those behind the door decided.

"Yet I will see him. I have been sent to see him," Billedeau muttered, plodding back to the park, his blue bucket on his arm—a light burden now.

Came one to him where he sat under his tree on a sunny afternoon—a fellow unkempt, his face mossy with patches of beard, a vagrant, and yet his eyes were bright, and the sharpness of a man who has lived long on his wits among men marked his demeanor.

"You have come here to stay, have you, my cock sparrow?" inquired the stranger. "I have been piping you for a week."

"I stop here till I have done my business, M'ser." Anaxagoras put his hand upon the little wad of money, alarm in his soul.

"What is vour business—yag, vag, hobo, moucher, or bum?"

"I think I do none of those—I'm poor man—I have learned no trade like you say! I fiddle for my living among the poor folks, my friends, in the St. John Valley."

The fellow sat down on the grass and looked the old man over with new interest.

"Well, Fiddler, in the name of the Ancient Order of Grass Warmers I welcome you to our city. I can't present you with the keys, because we never lock our bedroom doors."

The old man blinked without understanding this chatter.

He stammered: "Merci, M'ser!" several times, feeling that some sort of kindness—he did not know just what—had been offered to him by this stranger of the sharp eyes and the glib tongue.

"I say, old man, you ain't what I took you for in the first place," cried the stranger, after a further shrewd survey of the queer garments, the sunburnt face, the blue bucket.

He lighted the stub of a cigar that he fished from a pocket of his sagging waistcoat.

"You're in the dumps, old fellow. You haven't been larking and playing lately. I've had my eye on you. Now out with it! You need to talk to some one. I'll listen. Maybe I'm your fairy godfather in disguise. Perhaps you have got a worse tale of woe than mine is; if that is so it will make me cheer up to hear it. Go ahead!"

Ah, the days that Anaxagoras Billedeau had not been able to talk with any one in that wilderness of humanity! He who had always found so many folks to talk with along the roads of the border! His troubles swelled within him, eager to take the form of words. This ragged man with the cheery eyes had been the first to look at him as one fellow-man should look at another.

Billedeau dragged his shabby hat from his gray hair and twisted it between his nervous hands. Speech burst from him. Yes, here was a man who would listen! Till now he could talk only to the sparrows, the cloud shadows, and the trees.

He told the story of the troubles of Attegat, how he had been sent on this far journey, and his voice trembled with the pathos of unshed tears as he pointed to the golden cross above the tree-tops and related how he had laid siege to the great bishop's oak door.

Another man who had been loafing at a distance, a slouching figure of a man, saw the waving hands and heard the shrill tones in which the old fiddler voiced his sorrow. He came, dragging his feet on the grass, and sat down beside the fellow of the sharp eyes and nudged him after he had listened for a time.

"Say, this will be easy picking, bo," he whispered. "He must have the price of a return hidden on him. Let's you and me make a brother job of it as soon as it comes dark."

Billedeau had finished his story and was looking at them wistfully.

The man of the sharp eyes turned slowly and regarded the new arrival with chilling stare.

"Don't you realize that you are shoving yourself in on a private talk between friends?" he demanded.

"Oh, I see," sneered the other. "When you get a real good thing you don't want to split with a pal. Intend to take it all for yourself, eh?"

The sharp eyes fixed themselves once more on the old man's face.

"Fiddler, have you got money in your clothes?"

For a moment Billedeau hesitated. But the eyes were not hostile. There was something frank and compelling in them; and the man had listened so carefully!

"I have money," he faltered. "It is not mine. It is much money for a poor man to have. I have worried all the nights."

"Fiddler, you hurry over to your church, there. Speak to the first priest you see. Tell him you're a stranger and ask him to care for your money until you call for it. There are thieves in a city like this. Here is a sample of one of them—this man sitting beside me. Go, leave your money. I will watch your bucket until you come back."

The fiddler cast a horrified look at the person who had been pointed out as one of those wicked pursuers of other folk's money against whom he had been warned. He trotted away, his palm pressing hard upon the little wad in his trousers pocket.

"When you propose to be a friend to one in need it's well to remove temptation from your path," muttered he of the sharp eyes.

All at once the consciousness came to him that the man at his side was cursing him horribly.

He leaped to his feet and dragged the other up, then he kicked the slouchy curser for half a dozen paces along the turf.

"That's a hint for you to leave a gentleman undisturbed when he wants to meditate on the troubles of his friends," he informed his captive when he had cast him off. He went back to the bucket, stretching his arms above his head. "That's one curse of this happy life of a hobo for a man educated for something else," he soliloquized. "There are so many cheap muckers who take to the road! But I suppose I would have found just as many cheap ones in the law if I had stuck on."

Billedeau, returning, found his new friend sitting on the grass pensively skinning seeds from a stalk of robin's plantain with his thumb-nail.

"He took the cash, eh?"

"Yes, M'ser."

"There are some ways in which the pulpit can bless the world."

He was silent for some time, busy at his plantains, plucking one after the other.

"So you want to see the bishop, eh, my friend?"

He glanced sideways at Billedeau, and the old man

nodded his head, as though he did not dare to burst into speech again.

"Do you suppose you can talk to him as well as you just talked to me, Fiddler? For if you can, I understand why some chap up your way was wise enough to put you onto this job you've got. I know good jury talk—what kind wins verdicts. I used to be a lawyer."

Billedeau did not reply, for he did not understand now.

"It was good talk, Fiddler. It had to be good talk to fix me—and it did just that! It's a great thing, is talk! It has won kingdoms, it has overthrown monarchies, when the soul was behind simple sentences. And, on the other hand, men have yawned and slept through grand sentences which had not soul behind them. I don't think I would have made a good lawyer, anyway. There was never much soul in me. You surprised me just now when your talk uncovered a little spark of soul. But it was good talk, Fiddler, mighty good talk! It had to be, I say, to swing me as it did."

He tossed a handful of plantain seeds toward some sparrows.

"It looks as though you need a little help in this thing, doesn't it, Fiddler? I wish there was a little more horse-power to me—I could boost harder. But I've found that these hundred-horse-power fellows are too busy boosting for themselves. It's usually left for some poor cuss to help the other poor cuss in this world. But not much power in me, and a mighty short pole for boosting! And a bishop is high up!"

He pondered for a time, and Billedeau crushed his hat between his knees and gazed on this new friend hopefully and hungrily.

"Let's see—did you ever lay eyes on your bishop?"

"Oh no, M'ser," said the fiddler, with awe.

"He's a nice, kind-looking old gentleman. He and I haven't a speaking acquaintance, you understand. But I see him riding around the streets every now and then. No style to him, not at all, Fiddler! He goes poking around in a phaeton as broad as a hen's nest, driving an old plug of a white horse all by himself. I reckon those priests haven't told him about you at all—don't propose to let you get at him. Looks like that! Sometimes that's how the men in high places get the reputation of being hard—the understrappers are too officious."

He arose suddenly and motioned to the old man to get up.

"Understand, this is only a gambler's chance we're taking, Fiddler! It may not work. If I were more of a tool I could plan something worth while. But poor devils like you and me have got to gamble. Come along. I'll do a little more thinking on the way."

With his heart in his mouth the old man followed. His guide did not go toward the bishop's house, as Billedeau had expected. He started away in another direction, and the fiddler was astonished, for devious methods of going about great affairs were not understood by his straightforward nature; he had gone to the bishop's door, for his business was there—he had gone again and again.

"Don't be frightened—don't be surprised," his companion said. "You understand now that I am not after your money. But in this life, Fiddler, the roundabout way with big men is sometimes the only shrewd way. You haven't learned that yet. You haven't had to practise it. I have had to think up those roundabout ways so as to get my rake-off from life. Perhaps I can be your fairy godfather after all."

Past great buildings, zigzagging from street to street, they went on until they came to woods once more, greater

woods than there were in the little park. There was a small lake whereon swans floated. Children played under the trees. Broad, smooth roads led here and there. The dusty old man with the blue bucket and the ragged fellow at his side seemed more unkempt against that background, and smartly attired folk who strolled along the avenues frowned upon them as they passed.

"And yet they ought to appreciate us from an artistic standpoint, Fiddler, because a bit of a ruin in a landscape makes the rest seem more beautiful." But the old man had given up trying to understand the strange chatter of this ragged chap of the sharp eyes.

They came at last to a bench beside a shaded drive and sat upon the cool zinc of the rest-place.

"He may drive here to-day, he may not, Fiddler. I only know that I have seen him drive here many times; and old men stick to their old habits. Now, if you get the chance to speak to him—if this gamble works—remember your card, Fiddler. I mean to say, remember those poor folks you were telling me about! Forget that he is a bishop. Keep thinking that he is a kind-faced old gentleman who needs a little talking to. Put in your best licks! Get that packet of papers handy. I'll be mighty ashamed of you if you can't talk twice as well to him as you talked to me. No, leave those beads alone, now. Pray later on! Double your fists like a man and remember your good priest, whatever his name is, and your people who are waiting to hear whether you have made good."

On and on went the chatter of the ragged fellow, encouragement, adjuration, and appeal, and Billedeau ceased to tremble, and the spirit of Acadia began to warm his breast. Time, too, went on and on, and the shadows lengthened on the grass, and the children ran away home,

and the stately folk who walked and rustled and flounced thinned from the avenues.

Up the shaded vista and down the shaded vista the sharp eyes kept darting.

All at once he cried out so suddenly that Anaxagoras leaped upon the bench.

"Stand by, Fiddler! Grab your chance if it comes to you! For your life, now, when I yell the word. That word will be 'Fiddler.' When I yell 'Fiddler' it will be your move!"

He beat his fist upon the old man's shoulder to emphasize his orders. Then he hurried to the edge of the sward that hemmed the white surface of the avenue.

Far up the vista, emerging like a white cloud from a cavern, came a fat horse, plodding with sluggish trot. Soon the clup-clop of the animal's hoofs sounded in Billedeau's ear, but whether he were hearing the hoofs or his own heartbeats he did not know. In his misty eyes the carriage behind the horse took form. Framed between the canopy's spreaders, outlined against the gloom of the carriage's interior, was a face. On that face Billedeau stared, as one lifts fearing, fervent, adoring gaze to a revealed divinity. What he felt within him was not recognition of a great man; it was instinct telling his startled soul that this was he! It was the great bishop! He pulled off his hat and dropped it under the bench. He sat like one paralyzed, jaw drooping, eyes protruding.

The ragged man waited until the dozing, unsuspicious horse was nearly abreast. Then with a deft jerk of the wrist he snapped his dented bowler-hat spinning under the animal's feet. The act was concealed from the bishop, but the horse saw and tried to gather all four of his hoofs off the ground at the same time, snorting his fright at sight of this rolling, spinning, leaping thing that came at him like some savage little beast from the covert.

The next moment the ragged man leaped forward and seized the struggling, shying horse by the bits.

"Do not be frightened, Bishop," shouted the fellow. "I'll hold him until he is quiet. A squirrel frightened him. Horses are such silly beasts, Bishop. Whoa, horse." He had pulled the animal to a stop. "Whoa—*Fiddler!*"

The word moved Billedeau as a charged wire might have jumped him. He leaped from his bench. He ran to the side of the phaeton. He kneeled in the dust of the road. He dragged the precious packet from his pocket. Down his upraised face tears streamed.

"From Attegat—from far-off Attegat, great Bishop! I have come all the way. I am from the poor people. Oh, on my knees I pray you! These are the names. It is for the good priest whom we love. They are asking it of the good God on their knees. I ask it of you on my knees!"

The bishop's alarmed eyes traveled from the stilled horse to the upraised face, to the pathetic man who kneeled in the dust beside his carriage.

Speech was bursting from the old man. The packet wavered in his outstretched hands. His hands were trembling as do the hands of one with ague.

"Wait—wait, my son," commanded the bishop, at last. "Do you mean you have been sent with a message to me? Then why have you not come to my residence? A message from the people of Attegat? It should have been given to me?"

Again—stammering, sobbing, pleading—Anaxagoras faltered the poor little story of his quest, his weary waiting, his hopes, his fears, his patience.

Gently the bishop took the packet, leaning from his carriage.

The ragged fellow was holding the horse, caressing the white nose.

"The story—the great story! I have to tell it to you, oh, reverenced Bishop. It is in my heart—all the story of my poor people who look to you—who adore you."

Ah, that pleading of the humble and the sincere! That wondrous human quality of soul behind the spoken word!

"You shall tell me, my son," said the bishop. "To what place shall I send for you?"

"I have slept the many nights under the trees, waiting. I have no place," sobbed Anaxagoras Billedeau.

The bishop hesitated for one moment only. He looked at the ragged man who held the passive horse; he glanced at the blue bucket beside the bench.

"Is that yours—that bucket?"

"I brought in it what I eat—I brought it from Attegat."

"Get it, my son, and come into my carriage. We shall hear this story from Attegat," said the bishop.

"Good-by, Fiddler," said the ragged man, as he patted the horse's nose and released the bits. He looked at Billedeau as he said it and smiled as the carriage rolled on. But the old man sat on the edge of the cushioned seat, stricken, voiceless, trembling; and so he passed on, and he and the ragged man never saw each other again in this life.

The ragged man plodded after the carriage, rubbing his dented hat on his elbow.

"I wonder whether God is going to remember me at supper-time for this job," he murmured.

XXVI

THE PICTURES THE BISHOP SAW

CLUP-CLOP, the white horse of the bishop's phaeton plodded on; clop-clup, and the heart of Anaxagoras Billedeau thudded its beats, keeping time to the beats of the hoofs.

Anxiety, vigils, and privation had wrought their havoc in the simple mind of the old fiddler. His mental hold upon the verities of life had become attenuated. He had been thrust into a world of unrealities when he came out from the placid valley of the St. John. There in the rush and roar of the city he had been in a waking dream.

Plod-plod, the bishop's horse went on under the long shadows of the park's trees.

Who was this sitting so straight on the edge of the cushioned seat of the bishop's carriage—a figure so starkly stiff that it seemed like something carved from wood? Surely this could not be himself, not Billedeau the fiddler! Those were his gnarled old hands that clutched the hat he had not dared to put on; surely those were the hands of Billedeau! He had viewed them for many years; he could feel the callousness that the fiddle's strings had thickened.

Sitting one night with his shoulders against the shaggy bark of his friend, the tree—his only friend in that wilderness of bricks and humanity—he had dreamed that the

great bishop had spoken kindly to him and had smiled on him.

But surely this was a more wonderful dream!

Click-clack! The hoofs were now on the stones of the street, and the phaeton was passing in the shadows of great buildings. There were many clattering wagons, and cars rushed past, and the bishop was intent upon his reins. He did not speak. Yes, it was a dream! It was only more of that unspeakable jostle and hurry and tumult of the city he had been hating and fearing—its dreadfulness put into more hideous contrast by that serene figure at his side—and all for his woe and his undoing—for he must waken.

Clack-clock, click-clack—on and on! Through cañons of roaring streets, across squares where humanity flowed and eddied! What devils were those fiends who sent such dreams as this to torture the soul of a poor fiddler who had tried so hard and had failed!

Then, at last, softened blows of the hoofs upon loose gravel.

The white horse had drawn them under the archway of the bishop's gate.

Billedeau could hear his heart beat now, beating like the sound of galloping hoofs.

Under the sunset gloom of the *porte cochère!* The oak door was flung wide. No longer the jealous crack of an opening that had greeted the poor petitioner from Attegat. Obsequious attendants came trailing their robes to the carriage's side. They gave hands to the bishop.

"Follow me, my son," directed the reverend man. "Leave your bucket. It will be cared for."

Anaxagoras Billedeau had no side glances for the astonished faces of those who received the bishop. His

eyes, as round and as hard as marbles, were on the venerable, bowed figure ahead of him.

Through the bare and echoing hall, up broad stairs, past double portals, and into a lofty room, where he stood, not daring to raise his eyes!

When he did lift them, at last, at sound of the bishop's voice his startled vision took in the broad band of purple that incased the great man's waist, the purple fringe of the little cape, and he saw the great purple stone of the bishop's ring. He sank to his knees. No, this could not be a dream!

"Rise—rise, my son! Sit there. We are to have a talk, you and I. It seems that I should know some things concerning your parish that I have not understood."

He began to question gently. He patted the packet of papers. He asked about the names.

And, after a time, the great lump in the throat of the fiddler was pressed down by his trembling fingers. At first he quavered answers to questions. But he dared to raise his eyes above the purple band. The face he saw was benignant, placid, reassuring. The eyes were brown and tender. The mouth that could set itself so straightly on occasion, the brows that could knit, as the wrinkles so plainly indicated, now expressed toleration, kindness, expectancy. The bishop of the diocese knew men; and he had been touched to his depths by this appealing emissary from the north—this poor man who expressed humility and reverence and awe so profoundly.

A "psychological instrument"! Sagacious old patriarch—Clifford, a man who had studied men! You would have reveled in that scene in the great chamber of the bishop of the diocese.

For Billedeau, heartened, sympathy drawing language from him as naturally as the sun draws moisture from the

sea, gave out his story from the full reservoir of his being.

The bishop leaned his head back against the dark leather of his chair, interlaced his long, white fingers, and gazed at the ceiling.

As Billedeau talked, the simple eloquence of his full heart rushing from his lips, the bishop saw strange pictures take form in the shadows of the ceiling's moldings.

He could look into the homes, the plain little homes which dotted the green hills of the valley of the far St. John. He could hear the plaintive whirr of the spinning-wheels, the chatter of the children, the croon of the old Acadian *chansons*. He could see the quiver of the blue blaze above the hillside farms, the sheen of the lights on the ripples of the river. He could hear the tinkle of hoe against the stones of the narrow farms.

He heard the thrill of the music when the poor folks lightened their toil with a dance on the grass.

He heard the mellow bell of the parish church of Attegat peal its summons across the meadow where the Sunday calm breathed above the alders and hushed the brooks. He saw the long lines of buckboards winding down toward the village square under the banners of white dust. He saw little Father Leclair walking from the stone house, his rusty cassock dragging on his heels.

He saw him ministering to his people, understanding them, loving them, as simple as they in faith and honest endeavor to make the most out of what they found in Attegat.

The little door of the big barn—how that picture did glow in the shadows of the ceiling! The big barn of the parish of Attegat, where thrift and need found a clearing-house that struck its true balance for the good of the people!

The bishop caught the excitement of that night of couriers. He fondled the packet on his knee as the old man related how the Pelletiers, the Cyrs, the Archambeaults, and the Heberts had awakened and wept and signed and prayed.

And the bishop could feel the eager wistfulness of that waiting people who listened now for the news which was to come from that lofty chamber of his far down by the sea, where he leaned back and watched the pictures in the shadows on the ceiling. An entirely new sense of responsibility came to the bishop; it was a thrill of authority, almost. That isolated country of the border! He had almost forgotten how great was his power to make or to mar.

"Go on, my son," he murmured, when Anaxagoras paused. "I have much to learn."

And then he heard the story of the disputed lands, the tale of the crowded farms, as narrow in these days as lanes. There were sad pictures in the shadows—creaking wagons loaded with poor treasures of despoiled homes, and women and children following, weeping, behind the wagons like mourners plodding after the hearse that held their hopes.

Ah, then the bishop murmured as he listened, and the wrinkles deepened in his forehead.

"Wait one moment, my good son," he commanded, and he rang a bell.

Along the hush of the corridor without came heels striding sturdily. It was Father Callahan who entered.

"Listen to this man—what he says of the land of Attegat. Go on, my son."

The fiddler obeyed.

There was an end at last.

The bishop lowered his eyes from the ceiling and came forward to the edge of his great chair.

"I have not understood all of this affair till now," he said. "There is a solemn duty ahead of us. Out of the mouths of children cometh wisdom—but the listener must be wise to understand."

His face was stern.

He revolved his chair slowly until it faced his desk. He drew paper to him, dipped his pen, and made the cross at the head of the sheet with firm strokes. He wrote, and there was no sound in the room except the scratch-scratch of the pen. He signed and folded the paper.

"For you, Father Callahan," he said, extending the document to the priest. "It is an order. Notify the vicar-general I have restored Father Leclair to his parish —to the people who need him."

Billedeau wept silently, not knowing that he wept. The tears fell upon the hands that crushed his old hat.

The bishop wrote again. He turned and held the paper toward the old fiddler.

"For you, my faithful son. You shall carry it home in place of the packet you have brought. It tells your people that you have done your errand as, I believe, no other man could have done it, for simple faith can move mountains. At least, it can make a bishop see his duty."

The old man stumbled toward the outstretched hand; and the bishop gave him his blessing as he knelt and received the precious paper.

"I place this man in your hands, Father Callahan. I detail you to perform the duty which is plain and pressing. Go with this man into the north. He will lead you to Father Leclair. I wish him to receive the news of his restoration from your lips with my blessing. Father

Leclair and this man know the people. Go with them from end to end of the district where all these troubles are pressing so heavily. Learn about these lands and these evictions, and find out the names of the parties who are responsible. Get information that can be used for evidence, and arrange for witnesses. For I shall go down before the next legislature and take up the cause of my people in the north with all the power that God may grant to me in my old age."

He walked to the door with Anaxagoras Billedeau, his hand on the fiddler's shoulder.

"Good night, and safe home to you, my son," he said, gently. "Be troubled no longer. Father Callahan will smooth all the way for you after this."

How did the good Père Leclair come back to Attegat—back to his people and his stone house and his garden?

There were scenes that day such as Attegat will not soon forget—gay scenes, pathetic scenes!

The long street of the village with the haze of dust above the heads of the people—for the word has gone on in advance of the little priest, and the wheels of the flocking buckboards have been rattling along right vigorously as the Norman horses pattered their way to town!

The massing throngs, faces alight and tongues chattering!

Swirl and sway of elbowing groups!

Children with arms heaped high with trailing evergreen, and women hurrying feverishly to finish the rude arch of welcome under which the priest must ride.

Notary Pierre Gendreau, on the steps of his office, peering toward the brow of the long hill and wiping the moisture from his spectacles as often as he peers, for fear that

his eyesight may miss the first hint of that for which he is looking.

Representative Clifford, by the notary's side, meditating on the news of the bishop's interest in the matter of the lands, and acknowledging again that God knows the details of His own business best.

And, on the brow of the long hill, Norman Aldrich and Evangeline, daughter of her people, waiting hand in hand, outposts of the affection of devoted Attegat!

A puff of white dust above the trees on the brow of the hill!

Father Leclair has come home!

Off with the hats!

Père Leclair is with his people once more.

And Fiddler Billedeau played for the flying feet that evening, "under the orchard trees and down the path to the meadows."

XXVII

VETAL BEAULIEU'S HIDING-PLACE

UTUMN came to Attegat and lashed the trees with the thongs of the driving rains. The limbs were stripped bare and the domed hills showed their desolate rocks. The summer has consolations for the poor. When the skies were blue and the air was balmy and the birds sang, the lively temperaments of Acadia rose above their troubles. They who had been driven from their homes in the clearings to the crowded houses of the river-valley had a bit of hope and all of outdoors to cheer them. And the puissant priest from far away, the father who was near the great bishop, had been among them and had promised intercession.

But when the rains beat upon the windows of the little houses, and the eaves wept all night long, and the women and the children could not stir abroad, and the men damply hugged the kitchen fires in the crowded houses, then the poor folk sat with elbows on their knees and were sad. There had been plenty of room when the summer invited out-of-doors. But the houses in the river-valley were too full when all were forced to seek refuge from the weather.

There had not been time to build other houses—there was no land where other houses could be built. The tyrants of the timber-lands were unrelenting. And hopes grew dull under the dull skies.

Through the clouds their sun of joy had shone in one glorious burst of radiance. Not soon would they forget the return of the good Father Leclair! But Father Leclair was now waiting and hoping like the rest of his people. To be sure, he could see farther than they. The plans of Representative Clifford and the glowing expectations of Norman Aldrich, more roseate after he had come back from a conference with his lawyer friend, heartened the little priest; Father Callahan's visit and interest and the determination of the bishop to take action in behalf of his people of far Attegat seemed a promise that had a touch of divine intercession in it. But the poor people were suffering. Winter was heralded by the sough of the leafless branches and the roar of the autumn rains; and many men had been obliged to leave their little crops to wither and mold in the forest's clearings.

Father Leclair walked on the brown grass beside his garden-plot, his old hound at his heels, and heard the wind whistle through the stumps of stalks and dead herbage, gazed at the little door of the big barn, and wondered whether the resources of his clearing-house would endure through the dark days which were pressing upon them.

Lonesome indeed was the aspect of the gaunt, stark chimneys which marked where the big school once loomed so grandly.

It was good to know that the bishop now understood better what that school had stood for in Attegat and what it proposed to stand for. The word which had come to Père Leclair from the bishop was comforting.

But the plight of the school when the rains came and the trees were stripped was sad when one loved the children and understood what they needed.

The little town-house was crowded by those who toiled with the tools and were learning the trades. A room here

and there in a home was loaned, and dusty garrets were swept and garnished for the use of Master Donham's pupils. But the school missed that happy and impelling spirit of fraternity and co-operation which had marked the days in the great new building on the hill. Representative Clifford wondered whether he would be able to convince another legislature that Attegat was still deserving. He shared Master Donham's convictions as to the origin of that fire; but the incendiaries had covered their trail and kept their secret well. It would make the begging for more money a harder task while those who had destroyed remained unpunished; the representative worried over the situation and vainly delved for conclusive evidence.

But there was another mystery of the border that was more ominous, more puzzling.

Where was Vetal Beaulieu, of Monarda?

On that grim day of the legislative convention men had whispered a sinister question in the ear of Norman Aldrich.

In those later days of bleak autumn the question "Where is Vetal Beaulieu?" was not whispered on the border. The query ran from mouth to mouth. Men asked it of each other in tavern, at church, in store, and when they met on the highway.

All up and down the border little hoards of money were tucked away in clock-case or in cupboard's cranny, waiting for the call of Vetal Beaulieu, who was wont to dun his debtors and would not accept excuses or delays. But Vetal Beaulieu did not appear to demand! Men with money in their fists, worrying over their debts, knocked vainly on the door of the house in Monarda clearing.

Norman Aldrich had knocked there oftener than any one else. He was seeking Vetal for that man's talk; but

most of all he was urgent for the sake of Evangeline, wistful and anxious in the north, grieving over the memory of that bitter night when she had seen her father for the last time. During many hours of meditation she had reviewed her attitude toward her father. He had been harsh, unreasoning, and obstinate; but the injury must be grave, indeed, that a girl cannot forgive in a father. In her remorse, because her woman's better nature had forced her to be undutiful, she pleaded her father's cause before her heart's tribunal; and, as the days went on, she longed more and more earnestly to go to him and prove that she loved him.

But the door of Beaulieu's Place was not opened to Aldrich's knock when he went as envoy for Evangeline and pleader for his own cause.

The padlock had rusted in the autumn rains. Those rains had packed the dead leaves on the sill and into the door-corners—Nature's seal for a house untenanted.

The misshapen man dodged in and out of the tie-up, and snarled the everlasting answer that he knew nothing about Vetal Beaulieu. His work, he explained, when questions had stirred his snappy temper, was to care for the cattle and the horses of Vetal Beaulieu and let Vetal Beaulieu's other business alone.

Aldrich searched long through the country-side for the sullen youth who had driven home Beaulieu's horses. That person must know more than he had revealed. But Aldrich could find no trace of the youth.

The officer probed this case with his thoughts while he rode upon his business.

He was unwilling to believe that harm had come to Vetal Beaulieu. The anonymous note to Evangeline and the sneering whispers in his ear only assisted his belief that Vetal Beaulieu had gone in hiding for purposes of

his own, hoping that this bit of craft might accomplish that in his affairs which brutal force had failed to bring about. Perhaps he hoped that his absence would soften the rebelliousness of his daughter; perhaps he hoped, with Roi's connivance, to create trouble and suspicion for Aldrich. The note and the whispers would indicate that sort of a plot. It was crude and clumsy intrigue, but Beaulieu had never shown himself to be a master of craft.

Beaulieu had many enemies; threats against him had blown about the border like thistle-down on the breeze. But Aldrich did not attach much weight to those threats —he estimated them merely as so much thistle-down of language—for the Gallic tongue is quick to threaten in times of stress and the hands are slow to execute when the sudden anger cools. It could not be that violence had been done to this man. A crime would have been revealed, the officer was certain.

Vetal Beaulieu was hiding away; that was it!

But why did he hide so long?

Aldrich viewed the several facets of the affair. Beaulieu had been collecting money with all his might and main. Was it not probable that he had decided to leave the section for a time until the matter of the attempted abduction blew over? Beaulieu was undoubtedly away giving the world a bit of a looking-over; but he truly was staying away a long time!

On the other hand, Beaulieu might be hiding nearby where he could keep an eye on affairs; after all, that would be more like Vetal Beaulieu, the officer decided.

But Beaulieu seemed to be a long time working out the plot, whatever it was he had planned.

Aldrich guessed one thing rightly: Vetal Beaulieu was hiding.

Aldrich was correct in another surmise: Beaulieu was hiding close at hand.

He was patient in that hiding. In a cleft between the ledges on the top of a hillock, a stone's-throw from the side of a lonesome road through the woods to the east of Monarda clearing, there was his hiding-place.

The coppice at the brow of the hillock was a dense growth—witch-hobble, stout little shrubs of hornbeam and thickly leaved moosewood. It shielded the cleft in the ledges. And the cleft concealed Vetal Beaulieu where he hid.

He was very quiet as well as patient in that hiding-place. He did not stir even to count the money that stuffed his fat wallet, nor to paw over the notes and the pledges of payment; and that was unlike Vetal Beaulieu. The weeks passed, and he did not move, and he did not clink the coin in his trousers pocket. He did not even raise his hand to assure himself that his fat wallet was still safely buttoned under his coat.

Yes, very quiet and very patient in his hiding-place in the heart of the thick coppice was Vetal Beaulieu.

Then at last came the autumn rains and the winds which tore away summer's gay draperies.

For a little while Beaulieu was even more securely hidden, for the fallen leaves covered him. Later the leaves were washed into the crannies of the ledge, and other leaves grew sear and were blown away by the winds of November, and then Vetal Beaulieu was no longer hidden.

One day hunters climbed the hillock. There were four hunters. One of them had urged the others to mount the little hill with him in order to scan the country roundabout for a sign of deer. The three had protested that this was not the right way to hunt game, for the deer would see the hunters and be off. But the one man had

insisted with peculiar obstinacy, and at last the three followed him.

He lagged behind when they were near the summit, near the cleft in the ledges, and the three did not observe when he drew small objects from his pocket and scattered them on the broad ledge he was crossing. These objects were empty rifle-shells, three in number.

"My God! Here's a dead man!" shouted one of the three who were ahead.

And all of the men hurried to the edge of the cleft and gazed down into the hiding-place of Vetal Beaulieu.

But no one of them called him by name as they gazed. That dead man whose face was a ghastly thing of brown shreds and whose hands were fleshless bore little resemblance to the publican of Beaulieu's Place, the rich man of Monarda.

The fat wallet and the papers told them who he was, after they had managed to control their dread and their disgust. The one who had urged them to come to the top of the hillock gingerly drew the wallet from the coat and exposed its soggy contents, and then they knew that they had solved the mystery of the absence of Vetal Beaulieu.

"He was shot," averred the man who held the wallet. "Here's the mark of one bullet right through this wad of money. Probably he got more than one bullet in him."

"Do you think it's murder?" gasped one of the hunters. "His money hasn't been touched."

"Of course it's murder," stated the man with the wallet. "There's a bigger reason for murdering a man than because you want to rob him."

"There are men up and down this border who have been abused by him, have been threatening to kill him,"

observed another. "The men who owed him money were pretty ugly."

"There are bigger reasons for murdering a man than because you owe him money and he has dunned you to pay," stated the ominous man with the wallet.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm not saying any more than that just now. There will be plenty of time to say things when the coroner sits, or when the testimony is called for in court. One of us has got to go for the officers. The other three will stay here and hunt for clues."

The men questioned him with their looks.

"It's a little thing, sometimes, that fastens murder where it belongs. Let's see whether we can find any little things."

One man volunteered to carry out the news to the settlement—it would be a choice bit of sensation to shout in the ears of horrified listeners. He departed on the run.

The man who had made himself captain led his fellows about the hillock, to and fro.

"Look sharp," he kept advising them.

They came at last to the broad ledge and discovered the empty shells.

"They're out of the rifle of the skunk who did that dirty job," affirmed the leader. He joggled them carefully in the palm of his hand. "These cinch it," he said. "You all take careful note that these shells were found here. I'm going to seal them up here and now in this envelope—and it's lucky I happened to have one." He sealed them and marked with a lead-pencil across the flap of the envelope.

One of the men watched him with interest and with a frown of bewilderment.

"They're nothing but empty shells—I don't see how they prove anything?"

The other looked up from his crisscrossing of the envelope's flap.

"I thought you had owned a rifle long enough so that you knew something that any gun-man ought to know," he snapped. "Don't you know that no two firing-pins ever make the same mark on a shell? An expert can take a microscope and tell you in a jiffy whether my rifle fired that bullet or your rifle—or the rifle of some other fellow. A few men along this border will be called on to show a sample of the mark their firing-pin makes," he added, grimly. "They're mighty small marks on these shells in here, gents!" He shook the envelope at them. "But they're big enough to put the noose around a man's neck. They hang murderers on this side of the boundary."

He led them back to the edge of the grisly hiding-place of Vetal Beaulieu. They waited in gloomy silence for the return of their messenger and the officers of the law.

That night Vetal Beaulieu was back in his home once more. Men forced the padlock and burst into the broad room and removed the liquors from the truck and laid thereon the body of the owner of the place, for the coroner had ordered an autopsy upon that which remained of Vetal Beaulieu's body, and the truck was the table the physicians chose.

When they had done with him and had gone he slept there on the truck whose wheels straddled the line between two countries. They locked him in and left him there. This shapeless thing under the blanket had been Vetal Beaulieu, who for long years had stood beside that truck taking money with his hands wet with liquors. But when the mice came out of the crannies in the walls and

poked their inquisitive noses among the litter on the floor, Vetal Beaulieu did not arise and stamp about and frighten them, as he had done that night of his vigil when Evangeline came home. He was as still as he had been in his hiding-place all the months. The November wind searched the room, blowing through the cracked panels of the door where men had broken the wood in gaining entrance, but Vetal did not shiver under his blanket.

He slept at home once more while the tongues raged with the tidings of his murder, rioted and rattled all up and down the border; and Rumor stalked bigger and blacker and more bodeful as it traversed the country to and fro; and its wavering finger began to point more steadily, more menacingly at one man, the man who had pursued Vetal Beaulieu most persistently, the man whom Vetal Beaulieu hated most virulently, the man who loved Vetal Beaulieu's daughter, but to whom Beaulieu had denied her with all the bitterness of his soul.

So the news of the finding of Vetal Beaulieu came into the country to the ears of Evangeline, his daughter, doleful, dreadful, agonizing news. Her grief was the more bitter because it lacked those consolations that mark mourning for one who has been near and dear and generous and loving—for mourning then has only love to remember and trust to look back upon. And above her grief brooded something sinister; she did not understand exactly what it was; she would not admit that she thought again upon the poisonous suggestions of the anonymous note. But through and through her grief that vile slander threaded itself. It gave to her sorrow a keener pang, for it smirched something that should be holy—the grieving of a daughter for a father.

She was speeding south toward Monarda, Norman

Aldrich her charioteer, Madame Ouillette her comforter and her chaperon. Aldrich had hastened to her with carriage and swift horses, eager to perform this service, to watch over her safety, and to soothe her by his presence and his words.

XXVIII

FOR THE KILLING OF VETAL BEAULIEU

AT first Notary Pierre Gendreau wagged his head in deprecating refusal, wiped his horn spectacles nervously, and said that he could not.

But Evangeline pleaded.

Ah, it was not the task for an old man! So demurred Notary Pierre.

Yes, but it was a task for an honest man! So insisted the maiden.

Notary Pierre blinked at her, pitying her, knowing what meant those circles under her eyes, understanding the anguished trials that had met her in the south when she had gone hurriedly to face the horror of Vetal Beaulieu's undoing.

"I left all as it was. I am only a girl, Notary Pierre. I do not understand. I wish to place everything in your hands."

Yes, all that tangled skein of business, of usury, of money in store and money loaned, all which Vetal Beaulieu's hands had dropped so suddenly! The notary wiped his spectacles more vigorously. He pondered, and he was afraid.

"I have put my hand on nothing—I could not," she gasped. "I cannot tell you why, Notary Pierre. I am trying to be just in my thoughts to a father who is dead. But I could not touch that money. You must take it

into your hands—all the business. For it must be settled—it is the law, and you know what the law commands."

In the end his sympathy overcame his dread of touching the sordid affairs of the rich man of Monarda. So Evangeline went back to her scholars, and Notary Gendreau journeyed south to examine, to probe, to docket, to carry out the commands of the law in regard to estates, to put his notarial seal on the door of Beaulieu's Place, and to bring legal order out of the confusion of the dead man's affairs.

But, though he probed and examined and docketed faithfully, no word came to Notary Gendreau of that will of Vetal Beaulieu's, which had been tucked away in the safe of Bullhead Cyr.

Evangeline was the heir, the sole heir of a man who had died intestate, according to the belief of the notary and the country-side; and if there were others who knew differently those others held their peace.

One day after his return from the south the notary saw Norman Aldrich in the village street of Attegat. He called to the young man, led him into his office, and locked the door.

"I have heard many strange things in the south where I have been probing and examining," said the old man. "One thing I have heard is dreadful. Perhaps I should not speak of it, M'ser. But you must not think I mean to offer insult. I am too much your good friend to do that. But, being your friend, I feel that I must speak, must warn, must advise you to guard yourself against a great wrong. I talk to you of rumor." He wagged his head. "Wicked rumor, M'ser."

"What is the rumor?" asked the officer. The grave mien of the notary impressed him.

The notary pondered a long time before he replied. He

seemed to be trying to approach the subject from a tactful angle.

"You had trouble with the dead man, Vetal Beaulieu, eh?"

"Yes, I must admit that, sir."

"That trouble was talked of much along the border. It was known by many that you were pursuing him. That is true, is it not?"

"I searched for him week after week—hunted the border up and down. I made no secret of that search."

"Did you find him—see him?"

"No sir, not after that night when I saved Evangeline from that devil of a Roi."

"There were shots fired then, eh? Père Leclair has told me so."

"I did fire. Some person fired first. I was protecting her and myself. But I fired at random—to frighten them away."

The notary rubbed his nose.

"You did not know where the shots went, eh?"

"It was in the night."

"There was no other time when shots were fired?"

Aldrich paled. The body of Vetal Beaulieu had been found in a coppice to the east of Monarda. He had ridden on that road one night. He had seen horsemen. He had shouted and asked for Vetal Beaulieu. He had been fired on. In uncontrollable wrath he had replied with his rifle to that wanton attack on himself.

He told that story to Notary Pierre, hiding nothing, glossing nothing; but his soul was sick within him as he put into words what he realized must be a dreadful weapon when placed in the possession of rumor and suspicion.

"I may speak—I must speak," said Notary Gendreau,

when Aldrich had finished. "It has been written that Rumor is a foul bird. But I call Rumor, which an enemy trains, a snake, and it bites the unwary from behind. M'ser Aldrich, I do not know what mark your bullet found that night on the road east of Monarda. Perhaps it did not find any mark except a tree. But this I do know. The men who found the body of Vetal Beaulieu found empty shells from a rifle near by. It is said by men who understand firearms that exploded shells have a distinctive mark, that the firing-pin of every rifle makes its own individual nick."

"That is true, Notary Pierre. I understand firearms."

"Rumor says that those shells have been sent away to the experts, and that men on this border will be called on to furnish marks of the firing-pins of their rifles for comparison. Some person, M'ser, is spending much money to hire experts, to secure evidence for the courts. I have heard all that. I have felt it to be my duty to tell you."

"But I did not leave the highway that night, Notary Pierre. I sat on my horse and fired, and the horse ran with me. The shells were jacked onto the road. I was not in the woods near the hillock where they found Vetal Beaulieu."

"But men who have much money and great hatred and can hire witnesses and experts and arrange a plot and manufacture evidence—those men can make the acts of an innocent man look very black, M'ser. I have studied the law; I have heard of many horrors wrought by circumstantial evidence. I tell you all this for your warning."

Aldrich grew white to his lips.

Accused of the murder of Evangeline's father?

It had not come to that yet. But his quick fears leaped to the consciousness of what all this might mean.

Accused of compassing Vetal Beaulieu's death by the accident of a random bullet?

Even if intent were not ascribed to him his situation was damnable. He sagged down in his chair, horror and fear on his countenance.

"One of the men who found the body is a man who works for David Roi," the notary went on. "You should know all. You must protect yourself, M'ser."

The officer had agonizing realization of what a coil surrounded him, when circumstances were considered.

Jack Hebert had spoken warning truth far back on that June night in Bois-de-Rancourt clearing, when love had first broken into full bloom and Vetal Beaulieu had attempted so ruthlessly to uproot it. There had been threats and defiance then. He had scattered his empty rifle-shells recklessly since that meeting—he had fired recklessly. He could not stand before a tribunal and swear that he had not killed Vetal Beaulieu, though it was plain from what the notary had said that enemies had employed subtle means to bring the thing closer home to him.

He staggered to his feet and spoke his gratitude to the notary as best he could. He did not protest his innocence. Down in his consciousness there lurked horrible doubt of himself.

He could not carry that hellish, distracted doubt to Evangeline in her woe, even though he went to her to protest his innocence in intent.

He rushed to Representative Clifford.

"Notary Pierre is right," said the patriarch, when he had listened. "You have got to protect yourself, my boy. Roi is the chap who is spending money on this thing. If he can't get the girl himself, he reckons you won't be able to get her, either, after he has plastered this dirty

mess onto you. It's bad, Aldrich! We might as well look the thing right square in the eye. A girl can do a lot of things for love of a man, but I don't believe Evangeline Beaulieu is the sort to marry you in the face and eyes of this thing. She's the kind who would let her heart break first. You get 'outside' to the city as quick as horse's legs and steam can get you there. Put your case in the hands of your lawyer chum. You have got a fight ahead of you—as nasty a fight as a man ever bucked into."

Rumor ran with Aldrich as he galloped down the border. His horse could not distance it. Men stared at him in queer fashion. They buzzed behind his back.

He came north again to his station through the snows, after a time, to face the rumor. He had no intention of lowering his eyes before it.

The keen mind of his friend, after their long and anxious conferences, had been able to afford him one ray of hope.

"Look here, Norman," he had said, "the body of that man lay there for many weeks, exposed to the elements. So did those rifle-shells, providing they were shells of the man who did the shooting. We'll wait for the prosecution to produce those shells. We've got to wait. But in the mean time we'll have some experts of our own on the job. For, don't you see, while the weather was shredding that man's body the elements were oxidizing the brass of those shells? We'll have shells exposed to the elements. I'll wager that it can be shown that oxidation will eat all traces of a firing-pin mark off the brass of a shell."

He had clapped his hand on Aldrich's bowed shoulder.

"It's a plant, Norman! I believe we can expose it when the right time comes. But we'll have to wallow through some slime. Brace up to it. Ask the girl to stand firm. I'm afraid they've got enough evidence for

an indictment. Nerve yourself to endure it if it comes. Just reflect that if it isn't settled now and settled finally, the stain of it will always stay with you. But we'll wipe the blood off your character! I'm with you. We'll rip the inside of things open on that border before we're done!"

But Rumor met him on the border and went with him to the north through the snows. Rumor was now more menacing, more definite, for the tongues had been long at work. Those who were preparing the plot were taking their time in forging it; no man strode to him to lay hand on his shoulder and say, "Come with me and answer to the charge of killing Vetal Beaulieu."

He had resolved upon one course of action in those days of waiting in desperate anxiety under the suspended sword; he would act a chivalrous and conscientious part toward Evangeline Beaulieu during that bitter period of heart's stress. He sent Père Leclair to the girl with the message of his resolve. Until he could come to her, freed from this terrible thing which rumor flaunted over his head, he would keep away; he would not give peering eyes and wagging tongues opportunity to soil her with the evil that was upon him. Her present woe was grievous enough without that added shameful taunt that she had condoned the act of the slayer of her father before that man's innocence had been shown to the world.

He felt that he could not go to her then, even to tell her how certain he was that his hands were free of the blood of Vetal Beaulieu. It would be requiring from her a faith and a sacrifice he had no right to ask at that time.

Into the ears of sympathetic Père Leclair he poured his troubles, his doubts, his hopes, his devotion to the girl whom he loved; and the little priest carried all to her.

He brought back a message that made Aldrich's eyes fill and his heart glow; and then he went forth to do his duty and to wait.

The despondency that weighed upon Norman Aldrich during those bleak weeks of winter was a part of the woe that settled on all the land of Attegat. That woe weighed on the people as heavily as the snows of that winter weighed on the landscape. There were never before such snows! The gray clouds banked and delivered the grist the heavens ground. The sun would wade for a day or so and shed wan light, and then down came more snow, falling heavily, piling high, covering the fences of the narrow farms, blocking roads and thatching the roofs of the little houses until the windows of the gables resembled the eyes of old men peering out from under gigantic perukes.

The little houses were crowded still. The women and the children of the despoiled homes were there. The men had gone away, seeking work in the woods. Their families remained behind as sorrowful as widows and orphans, for in all the years past there had been comfort of companionship of united families through all the winters—cozy homes, well-stocked cellars, and the joys of the nights by the firesides. But now the fathers and sons were expatriated to the lumber camps for the long months—for the mouths must be fed.

In the dead of the winter Aldrich made another trip to the world outside. The legislature was in session, and he had held himself in readiness for the call from Representative Clifford. It came, and he hurried to the State's Capitol.

The land bill had been introduced. It asked that the State take note of the fact that there was danger that the citizenship of the commonwealth was about to lose hundreds of worthy men who had developed the wilderness,

had been sturdy and honest pioneers, and who desired to remain on the acres they had reclaimed. The bill provided that the State should purchase the lands, make good the disputed titles, and assure homes to these people who had worked hard and who deserved this service from the State. The bishop of the diocese was there at the hearing before the committee. He raised earnest voice in behalf of his people of the far north. Aldrich pleaded with all his young man's earnestness and eloquence. This stalwart chap with the clear eyes and the ringing voice won fame that day. He produced a profound impression, and men hastened to him and shook his hand.

But that was a tribute the lawmakers paid to him and his personality, not to the cause he advocated.

It was such unheard sort of legislation!

Was it constitutional; was it this, was it that?

And had not these people been in a state of rebellion for some months? Was there not pretty good reason for believing that the State's big school had been fired by Acadian incendiaries?

Aldrich and his friends discovered that numerous furtive and crafty agencies were at work. The lawmakers whom he besought in lobby and hotel displayed hesitancy, doubt, obstinacy.

And at last he ran against an obstacle which proved that the foes of the bill were clever and unscrupulous and masters of the art of controlling legislation. By some agency it was pounded into the heads of the lawmakers that this whole scheme was an indirect attempt of the rich timber syndicate to unload lands onto the State at a good price.

"We'd better withdraw the bill from the committee, Norman," his lawyer friend advised. "We'll say that we wish to make a new draft and embody some revisions,

But unless we get help of another sort from somewhere we'd better quit altogether. They've got us sewed in tight. You may as well go back to the border. I'll keep you posted."

"Even my school resolve has been nailed to the cross—and I'm afraid it's for keeps," mourned the patriarch. "The members of the committee of education have been filled up with stories that our poor folk are going about with knives between their teeth and torches in their hands; that all the people of Attegat are direct descendants of Robespierre and Marat. Old Clifford's Canucks don't stand very well in these times, since the liars have got in their fine work down here. They are spending money against us, my boy. God sent us Evangeline in that pinch; but in spite of God's omnipotence I'm a little doubtful about His being able to handle a State legislature. It isn't the right sort of material for Divine Providence to work on."

So Aldrich went sadly back to Attegat, where snow and troubles buried land and people.

He pondered upon the patriarch's doleful sentiments regarding the possible agency of Providence in their affairs. He saw little promise of aid from any human agency.

As before, Rumor waited for him at the border and went north with him. He came to a little tavern in a settlement beside the great river, and sat before the fire in the dim room where loafers whittled and gossiped the long evening through.

A man had been waiting for the return of Aldrich from the south. This man followed him to the little tavern, for Rumor had left her usual broad trail.

He stamped in from the night outside, kicking snow from his shoes. He walked to Aldrich and tapped his shoulder and asked the young man in low tones to step aside with him.

"I'm mighty sorry to be called to do this," he whispered, hoarsely. "But you're an officer yourself. You know what officers have to do. The papers have been sent to me from across the line. I'm a sheriff. A secret indictment has been returned against you."

"You mean to say that you—" gasped Aldrich.

"They seem to think they've got something on you in that Beaulieu case," broke in the sheriff, trying to soften the matter in an apologetic way. "Of course, I don't know anything about it. I'm simply ordered to arrest and bring you to the line. We'll stay here to-night and get away to-morrow. You see, I'm all for making it as easy as I can for you. Just give me your word as one officer to another."

"I will be ready for you in the morning, Mr. Sheriff," he returned, twitching his shoulders back, for he felt suddenly as though he were about to faint. One may look forward to a horror and expect to meet it bravely; but one may not always meet it unflinchingly when it shoves its dread front before the eyes.

Till then, after all, that growling rumor had been wordless, a menacing grumble that had followed the report of the coroner's inquest, which had charged the murder of Vetal Beaulieu to a person or persons unknown. But now, with the sanction of the law, rumor would shout his name in clarion tones. Evangeline in the north must hear that cry.

He turned from the sheriff and groped his way out of the tavern office, dreading the aspect of the faces of humankind.

In his room he put his face on his pillow and wept—wept such tears as are forced from strong men who realize that what they are suffering is a part of the suffering that has come to others who are innocent and whom they cannot aid.

The roof of the little tavern was just above his head.

In the silence of the night he heard other weeping!

It was soft at first, a queer, dull throbbing on the thick pack of snow on the tavern roof.

The heavens were weeping, too.

Those tears lashed the windows and thudded on the snow of the roof.

After a time, with rumble, shake, and shiver, the snow slid from the roof, and the deluge of rain came roaring on the shingles. It was a bursting of the reservoirs of the skies. Nor did it cease. The wind whined in the loose casing of the window like some animal made uneasy by what it foresaw and feared.

Aldrich did not sleep. That resistless, booming, never-pausing roar shook the roof above him, hour after hour.

He heard a voice bawl in the night outside.

"If this thing doesn't slack up pretty quick," said the voice, "there's going to be hell break loose in the valley of the St. John."

XXIX

THE GREAT FLOOD OF THE ST. JOHN

WHEN morning broke, the clouds were still charging the snowbanks with lances of the rain. Lightning ripped across the gray dawn, and thunder clanged above the hills. Thus Nature announced the ominous changing of her winter mood.

It was that phenomenon of the northern latitudes that the weatherwise term "a January thaw." Most winters exhibit one such freak, but usually the winter takes prompt and new grip, and the rains freeze in the skies and the north winds blow the clouds away.

But this was more than the ordinary thaw.

The south winds held. The clouds remained low-hanging in the skies and were such saturated masses that their skirts dragged upon the tops of the domed hills.

That dread event was beginning which is on the records of the north as "the great flood of the St. John Valley."

There are times when Nature seems to make long and careful preparation for an orgy of damage. This year she had piled the snow, layer after layer, covering the fences, fluffing it in drifts on the hilltops, packing it in the ravines, a congealed flood that the winter's cold had dammed, but a flood that the rains now freed for mischief.

Aldrich found a discouraged sheriff when he entered the men's room of the tavern in the early morning. The

county's officer was rasping stubby fingers through his beard and looking out into the storm.

The highway was a wallow of soft snow. Streams were dashing down the gullies and eddying across the bridges and the culverts which were in sight from the tavern.

"It might be done on stilts or in a balloon," said the sheriff, "but not with a horse or on our feet. We've got to stay here."

It was weary waiting for an officer who had his duty to perform, and for a prisoner who longed fiercely to face the charges of the law and rid himself of the burden of shame and the anxiety of delay.

Night came down on a drenched landscape, and the rain was still falling. During the long black hours it roared on the roof over Aldrich's head.

The first news of trouble came in the morning. A man had managed to struggle that far with a sack of mail. He said that the ice was beginning to let go up-river where the waters were swifter and the pitch of the river steeper.

The rain did not cease. The south wind held. Old January's white beard was gone, and the water streamed down his bare face. The rivulets, grown to torrents, rushed from the hills upon the ice of the river. The chill was gone from the air. The ice was softened.

When night came on again hollow sounds rumbled from the breast of the river. They were the premonitory growlings of chaos getting ready to burst its bonds.

Aldrich knew the St. John Valley as few men of the section understood it. He had fared along the river's banks in all seasons and had studied the river's moods. He listened there under the roof in the night, and knew the menace that hovered above the little houses of the long road.

Where the roads climbed the high banks the houses would be safe.

But the main settlements, the clusters of houses, were in the lowlands close to the river, on the alluvial meadows where the country was level and the soil was rich. With vision made clairvoyant by his fears he could behold what must be happening. The rising waters were cutting off the settlements from the hills. Meadows would become islands, isolated from the main by raging torrents that would sweep the base of the hills. Men would hope, would hesitate to brave the elements, and would delay to drag their women and children out of the shelter of the houses. That was more of that Gallic nature of constant hope and of dilatory optimism which waits too long before it acts.

He heard the grind of the ice-cakes when they started in the night. He rose and dressed and walked in the tavern's office until the wet dawn streaked the east. He peered through the fogged windows and saw the tumbling torrent below. The first flotsam of disaster was already sweeping past on its way to the sea. Mingled with the ice-cakes were hay-ricks that had been torn from the meadows, debris of barns, and the structures that the water had reached first, boat-houses and other frail trophies of the skirmish-line of the flood.

The sheriff found Aldrich at the window when he came down from his uneasy rest.

"This spells hell in capital letters," said the sheriff.

"It is only the beginning, Mr. Sheriff. I know the conditions along this river. It's all right for us here on the highlands, but I couldn't sleep for thinking what the conditions must be in the settlements of the Beaupré meadows. I'm afraid those people have been cut off before they realized their danger. I know they *must* have

been cut off. Somebody ought to be organizing a relief party."

"I reckon it would have to be a relief party of angels —with waterproof wings at that," returned the sheriff, displaying no enthusiasm. "Ordinary human beings can't get anywhere this weather to rescue anybody. I can't even start out with you to take you to where you're going."

Aldrich turned from the window and paced the room, his mind again on his own bitter troubles after the sheriff had dropped the remark. To where he was going! That meant jail. There was no bail for the offense with which he stood charged by his enemies. It must be faced! He must reconcile himself to remain in jail until he could be purged by the torturing fires of public trial. Even his own consciousness of innocence faltered at times when he reflected on the situation in which circumstance had placed him. Somehow this arrest, this visible reaching of the law for his collar, seemed to sanction all the suspicion that had been directed his way. By what wonder would he be absolved from the black doubt in his own mind?

He ate without appetite when breakfast had been served; he paced listlessly, waiting.

"I reckon there comes some news of something," remarked one of the tavern's loungers. He pointed to a bateau which appeared, swirling down the river's brown tide. There were two men in it, and they managed to beach their craft through the ice-cakes and came hurrying up the street of the settlement.

"Oh, Messieurs," they shouted to those who hastened from the tavern, "who is there here to help the poor folks of the Beaupré meadows? They have been waiting in their houses, hoping that the rains would stop. Now they have been cut off from the shore."

"You see I was right," stated Aldrich to the sheriff at his elbow.

"But that is not the worst," cried one of the messengers. "The ice has lodged in the Temiscouata narrows above Beaupré. It has made a great dam there. It must give way, and then all the men and women and children will be drowned. The people do not know what to do. They are shouting and running about, and no one is a leader with a cool head. The folks will obey a leader. But there is no leader—no one who is brave and who understands. Is there not some man here who will come and command those who are willing, but who do not know?"

The listeners muttered among themselves. The fat landlord of the tavern shook his head, the sheriff grunted more of his doubts about any others except angels being able to assist, and no man stepped forward as a volunteer.

"Are you going to stand here and let those women and children drown?" demanded Aldrich, hotly.

They scowled at him, for there was a taunt in his words and air.

"It is you, an officer, who could do much," entreated the spokesman. "You are known well on the border, M'ser Aldrich. You are a brave man. You do not lose your head as a poor Frenchman does."

"He can't go," snapped the sheriff, showing prompt alarm. "I've got particular reasons why he can't go, my men."

"Come with me, then; this is a call for help, and it's up to us as men," insisted Aldrich.

"I'm not taking any such chances. If there's going to be any traveling done it will be to where we're due."

This callous obstinacy was like the sting of a lash on Aldrich's self-control.

"I've given you my word. Accept my parole further while I obey this call."

"It isn't regular, and I can't do it."

"You're afraid to go yourself, and you don't want your own cowardice to be shown up if I go alone," blazed the prisoner. He could not keep that speech back. His whole being had been crying out within him at the injustice of this arrest. Now he voiced his protest recklessly. The sheriff's surly refusal to act a man's part had driven him into a passion he could not control.

"It has been between us like gentlemen and officers so far, Mr. Aldrich. If you're proposing to put it on another basis, go ahead—and see where you will wind up."

He added a sneer that the occasion did not call for, but the young man's taunt of his cowardice could not go unchallenged.

"Go alone, say you? What do you think one man like you up there is going to amount to?"

"I'll show you, Mr. Sheriff." He turned and ran toward the tavern's stable.

The sheriff plunged after him, shouting. He tugged at his hip pocket. But he did not produce a weapon. He carried none. He dragged out a pair of handcuffs.

"You'll have to take your medicine now," he declared. "You've put it all on another basis."

Aldrich thrust the officer violently to one side and struggled with the girths of his saddle.

"By Judas, do you think you're going to run away from me?"

"That's right—swear by your patron saint," gasped Aldrich, setting toe in his stirrup. "As for me—by God, I am!"

He swung to his saddle, lay flat to escape the door's lintel, and galloped away. The sheriff ran after, raving

and threatening. But Aldrich leaped his horse into a ravine, water-choked, made the higher land, and sped north over the ledges from which the rains had stripped the winter covering.

His hard-won knowledge as a border rider served him in good stead in that chase to the north. In the past he had followed many a smuggler through the devious stragglings of "The Red Lane." There were places where he was obliged to swim his horse, but for the most part he gained his destination along the ridges, by paths he had known before.

At last he looked down on the turbid flood which encompassed the threatened homes of the Beaupré meadows. It was plain that the ice-jam still held in the narrows above. The river was dangerously high, but it was not yet the tumbling, raging torrent that it would become when the Temiscouata narrows disgorged. He wondered how much time there was before this disaster would overwhelm all the valley.

Men had flocked on the highlands above the meadows. They told him that the jam was still packing higher and higher, that it was groaning and rumbling, and that the great St. John was sending down its avalanches of ice and water and must prevail in the end.

Those men crowding around Aldrich, recognizing in this stalwart chap who had rushed up from the south one who understood how to command, bewailed the little they had been able to do.

"Two brave men who went out from this shore have already been drowned," they told him. "Jules Bourdreau and Napoleon Sinclair, they have been drowned, for the ice beat against their bateau. We have not dared to launch more bateaux."

He gazed out on the rushing river.

"It is useless to send bateaux," he told them. "Even if boatmen can reach the houses and take in the people the boats will be swept away down the river."

More men were arriving, many of them astride their sturdy little horses. The customs officer became the center of a wistful band of farmers who muttered and chattered and stared at him and were barren of suggestions in that exigency. In times of stress men select a leader by instinct. And such a leader is obeyed because it seems to his followers that on him salvation is founded.

Aldrich knew of the slender resources of that region as well as he knew the highways and the byways. Desperate need made his wits nimble. On his way down the hills to the river he had passed one of the snubbing-slopes of the timber syndicate where loads of logs were eased down the mountain-side by means of great hemp cables.

Communication with the beleaguered settlements—the cables suggested a possibility! The snubbing-slopes extended for half a mile; he knew there must be many cables.

"If we had giants to paddle it we might use the ferry-scow which is pulled up in the logan down there," mourned one of the men. He pointed to a cleft in the river's bank.

"Is there a scow there?" demanded Aldrich.

"It is the ferry-boat for Beaupré upper settlement when the high waters come in the fall, M'ser."

Aldrich leaped from his horse. He was captain forsooth now.

No more doubt or hesitancy in his mind! Fate had put the tools into his grasp.

"You men with horses gallop over to the snubbing-slopes. Bring all the cables. If there are more in the store camp make the boss let you take them. Tell him it's life or death! Here! Bring axes, some of the rest of

you! Go out on that point and trim one of those biggest beech-trees for a snubbing-post. Pick the tree that's rooted firmest. Swing that scow free and hold her to the bank. Everybody to work, my men!"

Then there were hurrying and scurrying, shouts and clamor. They saw what he planned to do.

It was a desperate expedient, but, with many hands to help, it offered a chance.

The point of land on which men were smoothing the trunk of the big tree commanded the low island which the raging river had formed of Beaupré meadows.

Aldrich sent men hurrying for all the horses that could be gathered, for oxen, for more men. He ran here and there, exhorting, commanding, suggesting. Men toiled feverishly, willingly. They came with the cables, they came with more horses, and staring oxen were hurried to the scene, floundering through the mud.

The toilers clasped the smoothed tree with two coils of cable, and men who understood the snubbing of the loaded sleds on the slopes of the woods stood by to pay out.

Aldrich understood the desperate chances of the floating scow. The ice-jam hung in Temiscouata narrows like the sword of Damocles.

"I want two good men to help me with the steering oars on this scow," he told them. He leaped on board from the bank. "You know what it will mean if that ice-jam gives way. If there are two of you without wives or children you are the ones to come."

Two volunteers sprang to the deck of the scow. With their heavy sweeps the three sculled into the current, holding the nose of the craft offshore in the direction of the island. Ice beat against the planks, drift stuff menaced, the roiled flood trailed banners of froth past;

but the scow went on, eased down the turbulent tide at the end of the straining cable.

The frantic folk on the island saw and understood. They ran and massed themselves at the point where the scow must land. They screamed and leaped and waved their hands.

Aldrich, toiling at one of the sweeps, shouted encouragement and advice as the scow swung near the land.

"Your wives and your children, men!" he counseled. "We must make more than one trip. The weak ones first. Be Frenchmen!"

They at the other end of the cable understood their part in this frantic gamble with death.

Aldrich signaled with flourish of his hat that the scow had grounded.

He signaled again when the loading of the first cargo had been finished. He took his stand at the post to which the end of the cable was knotted. Though every horse, ox, and man on the main was now tugging at the tow-rope, that moment was an anxious one. Could they furnish the power to stem that current? Would the scow live through that battle with flotsam and ice? Aldrich was hemmed in by sobbing, fearing women and children; he left sobbing men behind him on the shore. He saw the long cable heave from the yellow water; he felt the scow move, swaying in the current.

He and his men armed themselves with the sweeps.

They couched the heavy oars like lances in rest.

They met the shock of the oncoming ice-cakes, tilting with those white knights of the watery field, endeavoring to break the shock of their impact on the planks of the scow. It was truly man's work, that task was! Blows that racked the bones were dealt by the ice-cakes. Aldrich set his teeth and fought, knowing that the safety

of that load of humanity depended on his keeping those mad charges of the ice in check, diverting the direct onslaught. And all the time he was fearing to hear the thunder which would announce that Temiscouata had opened her jaws to spit out those gigantic gobbets which choked her.

But he won in that first throw of the dice with Death!

Panting, lying prone with his two helpers on the deck of the scow, he saw his precious cargo discharged at last upon the solid ground.

He heard the cheers. Men rushed to him to press his bleeding hands.

Of the next trip they made better work. They had proved what the scow would endure. The rescued men with sticks and poles fought the ice on the return up the stream.

A half-hour later the dwellers of the Beaupré meadows stood on the high ground and heard the awful detonations of the bursting jam, saw the leaping cavalcade of the ice rush down and overwhelm the little houses; but they had won life out of the very teeth of death, and stood there unharmed, from the oldest grandsire to tiniest babe.

And all understood who had accomplished this and how he had played his part in it.

They who had done the most to aid him were the first to crowd around and shout their gratitude to him in that he had allowed them to help. They insisted that all the credit was his. Only by reminding them that there was other work to do in the valley did he manage to escape from this excited worship of himself. Women kissed his hands, bruised and bleeding from his toil at the sweeps, and held up their children. Men, with French fervor, embraced him and kissed his cheeks.

But Aldrich had only a sad smile for all this extrava-

gance. He was a prisoner who had run away from his keeper in a mad impulse to be of service in time of disaster. He was charged with murder; and that tiding must now be spreading from end to end of the section.

But he was resolved to go on to the close of the task to which he had set himself.

The valley was full of suffering. There were others to be saved. There were people to be fed and housed. There were plans to be made for getting word to the outside world, so that the charitable could assist in this time of ruin and despair. They had accepted him as their captain. They flocked around him, anxious to be commanded so that they could obey.

He put himself at the head of the band he had chosen from the men and went to and fro in his work of rescue and amelioration. Day after day passed. Each day imposed new burdens on him. He had become the heart of the work of aid and relief, for in that chaos one who can control all others must be the center of affairs.

The law called on him to go to the sheriff, so he pondered.

But that duty in the north summoned him with more imperative mandate, for his heart was in his work.

Yet, wherever he went, he expected to behold the sheriff's grim visage appear and to hear his summons.

Suspense was proving too great a trial for him.

He could endure the agony of it all no longer.

So, at last, he told his loyal little band of workers that he must leave them; and he told them why. He had noticed strange looks, had heard muffled whispers, and he thought he understood what all this meant.

Some of his men had left without telling him that they were going away. This defection indicated that there were many who believed the dreadful charge that had been

brought against him; and he mourned, and no more heart was left in him for his work.

He insisted that he must go, and after a time his men ceased to urge him to remain.

One man followed him a little way on the road, overtook him, and whispered to him.

"I am breaking my word to men who have pledged me, M'ser Aldrich, but when I saw you start to ride away south you looked so sad I thought I'd rather break my word than see you break your heart."

He patted the young man's arm.

"You have seen queer looks and heard whispers, and men have gone away without saying good-by to you, eh? You think that this all means bad things, eh?"

"I cannot blame them," returned Aldrich, lugubriously.

"No, that's right—you cannot blame them," cried the man, grinning in the face of the astonished officer. "You will hear what those whispers meant and why they went away—and you will not blame them."

He backed away as though he feared to say too much.

"You go on your way, M'ser Aldrich, and do not break your heart any more; because the poor people must find some way to pay a debt they owe to a man like you, even if they have to pay in their blood."

XXX

HOW ACADIA PAID A DEBT

WHILE Norman Aldrich was riding moodily down from the north toward the settlement where the grip of the law was waiting for him a dozen men whose faces were marked by grim earnestness were riding up from the south.

Aldrich found a sullen sheriff still marooned at the tavern. The man had no taste for wallowing through streams and climbing hills in pursuit of such a young madman as his prisoner appeared to be.

The sheriff tried to be bitter and sarcastic when his prey was once more in his hands. He even made a movement toward the hip pocket that held his handcuffs.

But the hard, gray eyes of this young man who came riding from the north made him blink and falter.

Mud-spattered, hollow-cheeked, and pale with vigils, toil, and fasting, his soul in arms against the fate which menaced him, Aldrich was not one to endure more, and his mien suggested as much to the officer.

"I am ready now, sir," the young man informed him. "You can make as much capital as you like out of what you call my escape; but talk of it to others, not to me."

"You needn't worry, I'm not going to mention it," muttered the sheriff. "I ain't inclined to make it any harder for you than it is now—and it doesn't reflect any particular credit on me," he added, with candor.

They went on their way, that truce, and a sullen silence between them. The sheriff rode a stumbling horse awkwardly, for the road was still impassable for wheeled vehicles.

The perils which he had endured for others, the toil in which he had plunged himself in that wild energy of despair, had blessed Aldrich with partial forgetfulness of his bitter plight for a few days. In his present prostration of mind and body he met the situation with hopelessness in his thoughts. Whatever might be the outcome of his trial by law—and after his conference with his lawyer friend he had accepted that ordeal as inevitable—the stain of it must remain. What did it all presage for the love and the future of Evangeline and himself? He had dared to face the impending horror of the Temiscouata jaws; but he dared not face his thoughts at that moment.

Through watercourses which had spent their force, over jagged rents where the floods had torn their way, he fared south with his grim companion.

Thus he met the twelve men who were faring north.

They massed in the road and halted. He saw with surprise that several of these men were the ones who had deserted him. One advanced from the rest and held up his hand.

"You are the sheriff?" he asked the surly officer.

"I am, and you fellows better not try any funny business." He had scented a plan to interfere with his prisoner. For one alarmed moment he feared a lynching, for these were Frenchmen.

"You have arrested M'ser Aldrich for killing Vetal Beaulieu? Is that it?"

"That's what the warrant charges."

The spokesman turned slowly and solemnly to the group of men and pointed to one of them.

"You will arrest that man there, M'ser Sheriff. He is the man who killed Vetal Beaulieu."

He had designated a shaggy, cowering man whose hands were lashed with a bit of rope.

"That is Joe Dionne, M'ser Sheriff. They call him Wild-wit Dionne in the place where he lives. His head is bad. His brains flew away a long time ago; and he killed Vetal Beaulieu because, so he has told us, it was so commanded by the good God who guards the poor people."

"He robbed, he took away the cows and the horses, he left the poor people without money, and the children without food," mumbled the man who had been pointed out. "It was told me by God that I must do what I did for the sake of the poor people."

"Say, look here! I'm no court to try law cases," said the sheriff, alarm and doubt on his face. "I'm taking along a prisoner who has been indicted all due and regular. I don't know anything about this other thing."

"Then you shall know," insisted the man who had first spoken.

He took off his hat and bowed to the sheriff's prisoner, a prisoner who listened with stupefaction.

In the band of men Aldrich now perceived that same sullen youth who had driven home to Monarda Vetal Beaulieu's horses on that night when the officer had been waiting to have his man's talk with Evangeline's father. He understood, to his soul's joy, that here undoubtedly awaited more evidence in his behalf than mere confession of a half-wit.

"Yes, you shall know, too, M'ser Aldrich, for it is right that you should know. You have put your mind and your strength to the saving of the people of Acadia, and you deserve far more than any poor service they can

return. This what we have done is only part of that service they owe. There have been strange stories on the border. There was much talk. There were men who knew the truth, M'ser, and they had money with which to cover up that truth. You know that Vetal Beaulieu came down on the poor people with all his anger, and the people were angry, too. This man here, Wild-wit Dionne, heard what the people said about Vetal Beaulieu. His brother lost his horse and his cows, and he heard the children crying for food. He followed Vetal Beaulieu. And what did he do—what did Dionne do to Beaulieu?" The spokesman shook his finger at the sullen youth.

"Dionne shot Beaulieu," confessed the witness. "He came up behind and shot him. It was on the road east of Monarda."

"Who else was there?"

"Dave Roi was riding with Beaulieu."

"What more?"

"Dave Roi took the body and hid it by the roadside, and he went for men who had smuggled for him, and they took the body to the hill where it was found. We were paid to keep still."

"And you know more," insisted the spokesman.

"I know that Dave Roi had saved shells from the gun of the customs man—he had found them somewhere in the north."

Aldrich, his brain clearing, his thoughts rioting, knew where Roi had obtained those shells; Aldrich had jacked them out from his rifle when he had stood off the gang which threatened to pursue when he had rescued Evangeline.

"And you knew that Roi waited and left Beaulieu's body in the woods until he had his plot ready, eh?"

"Men were paid to keep still. I was paid. It was Dave Roi's business. We have not interfered."

"But how have you found out all this—how have you made these men confess?" Aldrich gasped.

"We were all men of Acadia. We have been put in your debt and we could not pay. There were rumors. We hunted down these rumors among our people. And when we had hunted them to the last corner we knew what to do," stated the man, grimly. "We would have paid you, M'ser Aldrich, even if we had paid in our blood. We ask only one thing—that you will speak some wise words to the law for the sake of this poor man who killed and did not understand what a crime he was committing. He is only Wild-wit Dionne."

It had come so suddenly, so wonderfully, such glorious fruit of his own sacrifice in behalf of these people, that Aldrich was moved to an act which expressed his feelings, even as one of these simple-hearted men would have expressed his own. He took off his hat. He looked up at the sky.

"I return thanks to you, God, for your wonderful work with the human heart," he murmured.

He leaped from his horse then and went among them, stammering his gratitude. He clasped their hard hands and stared at their honest faces through his tears.

"There are other witnesses who will come forward—we shall know how to make them come," stated the leader.

'They must be assured that they will be protected from the dirty persecution of Roi, then they will come forward," cried Aldrich. "I will use what little power I possess to guard them from that man."

The man looked at Aldrich for some moments, a strange expression on his countenance.

"You have not heard, M'ser Officer of the Customs? No, it could not be that you have heard. David Roi learned of our errand when we came to hunt rumors to

their corner. He came raging, to stop us, to threaten, to frighten those who were there to do their duty and take away this disgrace from the Acadian people—for what could match the disgrace of letting a good and a brave man suffer for another's crime? We do not know just how it happened. We stand ready to take the blame. We only know we fought back. But no one will ever fear Dave Roi again."

"Is he dead?"

"No, he is blind. We took him home to the girl who has borne him a child. Perhaps he will make a wife of her now, for he must depend upon her eyes for the rest of his life; and I think Dave Roi will find that he has no other friend to lead his steps."

Fate was surely meting rewards and punishments at last with ruthless and steady hand, so Aldrich reflected.

He walked to the sheriff.

"We will all go with you to the border," he said. "We will help you to perform your duty, Mr. Sheriff."

Two days later a message came to Aldrich; and he could obey that message, for he was a free man.

Representative Clifford called him urgently to the State Capitol.

His full heart urged him to hasten to Evangeline with the story of their deliverance, but he resolutely faced his duty and hurried south. He knew that one of his faithful Acadian friends was posting north to Attegat with the tale that would brighten a girl's dark eyes.

"Out of the great troubles of mankind come the great blessings, after all," the patriarch cried, when Aldrich found him in the State House. "There's a change of heart here, my boy. The lawmakers of this State are not monsters. They have been stirred up by what has happened in the north. They simply have got to act

now. They're showing their human feelings! That flood may have raised the devil along the St. John, but it has also washed some of the confounded nonsense out of this legislature. We have introduced that land bill again. With these new troubles of poor Acadia before the people, there isn't a man who will dare to oppose it. Sympathy will sit as the honorary chairman of that committee hearing! Come along before it. It's you who can talk to 'em! Tell 'em the story of the flood! Show 'em your blistered hands. We'll put this thing into their hearts. Before, at that other hearing, we were trying to pound truth through their hard skulls."

That was a wonderful committee hearing! The big room was packed. Aldrich was heard with breathless attention. The needs of that people whom the rest of the State had not understood made sure and potent appeal to all who listened.

The tale of that disaster which had made desolate the homes of the little settlements touched all hearts.

The hero of the flood did not tell his own story. Others did that, and men crowded around to shake his hands and cry their compliments.

The lawmakers did their duty and succored a suffering people!

It is a matter of history how a great State gave fifty thousand acres of land to worthy settlers who had been fighting greed and prejudice.

And the story of how it was accomplished has now been told.

Thus, out of great woe sprang wondrous blessings!

Aldrich was impatient to be gone, to be back again in the north. But he stayed until the affairs of Acadia had been arranged.

Further intelligence came from the north. The men

who had undertaken to run those rumors to their corner also unearthed the fact that Louis Blais and David Roi had instigated the destruction of the big school on the hill of Attegat. The honest men were paying their debt of gratitude, and the law had its hand on the shoulder of that frock-coat whose tails Blais had flaunted so boldly.

The governor of the State sent for Aldrich one day before the young man left the capital city.

"Of course, there is no other man so well fitted as you to serve as chairman of the commission which I shall appoint to review claims and apportion this land to the settlers along the border, Mr. Aldrich. I earnestly request you to accept the appointment. The appropriation will afford lucrative employment, and the position will lead to better things, I am sure."

He had been dreading his return to Red Lane for many weeks. Its duties had become hateful; its perils had pursued him remorselessly. He thanked the governor with a full heart and laid aside the eagle badge forever.

Eagerly Aldrich prepared for his return to Attegat as the commissioned head of the new board on State lands, impatient to begin his important employment, knowing that he understood the people and could deal justly. He realized to the depths what this action of the State meant. It meant Attegat newly established, the homes of the people assured, boys and girls given opportunities to remain on the soil which they loved, the ties of kindred knitted forever in one great and contented community.

That he, personally, was to have so great a part in the readjustment of the rights of a people meant more to him than the returns in money, though he owned to himself that this money would play an important part in a matter nearest to his heart.

So he hurried back, when his work at the State House was finished, to Attegat and to Evangeline. And again, as he had confessed to himself once on the long road, he knew that his eagerness to be gone, his ardor of haste, his longing to be once more in the north, were inspired by the girl who was waiting up there for her lover!

XXXI

THE GIFTS IN THE LAP OF JUNE

UNE came to Attegat once more, swinging her censers of purple haze above the domed hills and over the twinkling river.

June laughed that year. June rioted in masses of herbage on the alluvial meadows where the floods had dumped the rich new soil. The people of the border laughed, too, for joy had been born out of sorrow, good-fortune out of tribulation.

Patiently, justly, sympathetically, three earnest men were distributing the lands to the settlers; and Norman Aldrich was that one of the three who was most exalted in the minds of a thankful people.

On the hill which dominated the village of Attegat hammers clanged and saws rasped from dawn till dusk, for the big school was rising from its ashes again, more spacious than before.

The merry music of that industry came in at the open windows of Madame Ouillette's cottage, and the crayon portrait of the deceased Monsieur Ouillette grinned most amiably. But if departed spirits can, as the widow of Monsieur Ouillette so fondly believed, show delight through the agency of their portraits, it is not at all probable that he was rejoicing that day over the diligence of carpenters. There must be more heart-interest in matters

which can draw the attention of a spirit from affairs of Paradise to things of earth.

There was heart-interest that day in the cottage where the portrait smiled.

There was subdued bustle in the home of Madame Ouillette—quiet, happy bustle. Only two were there, the madame and Evangeline Beaulieu.

"Yes, the kitchen and the little bedroom are enough for me," sighed Madame Ouillette, surveying her work of removal of her belongings, examining with glistening eyes the new furnishings which had taken the place of her own plain household goods. "For I shall not marry, Mam'selle. That is settled! He has frowned many times when I have been tempted. You may see how happy he seems now—now that I have given up the thought forever."

"Yes," admitted Evangeline, her cheeks rosy, "he has a wonderfully happy look. Everybody seems to be happy to-day."

"Ah, Mam'selle," returned the madame, archly, "when Love has scrubbed the looking-glass of life all so clean and bright, and you look into it on your wedding-day with a smile, surely the world must smile back!"

She came to the blushing girl, put her motherly arm about her, and led her toward the door.

"You shall go into the garden now and sit and dream, for the dreams of the wedding-day are the sweetest dreams of all life. My hands shall do what is to be done within here. That will be my happiness, Mam'selle. You shall cut the roses and lay them in this basket so that they may be ready when I come to the last task, for you shall come in to-night from under the stars to rest under the roses."

Love makes poesy blossom in the plainest life; Madame

Ouillette felt the influence of it, and her Acadian nature voiced that poesy as best she could.

Evangeline, in the garden, felt it more deeply and did not attempt to voice it.

Bullhead Cyr, of Cyr's tavern across the border, came to the village of Attegat that day.

He climbed the hill and found the girl snipping roses, lingering over her task, dropping blossom after blossom into a basket as though each were a rosary bead and a prayer accompanied it.

"This is Mam'selle Evangeline Beaulieu, eh?" he asked, hat in hand. He spoke low; he glanced about furtively.

"Yes," she said.

"You are the daughter of M'ser Vetal Beaulieu, and all his money went to you, eh?"

Her face grew white. The flush of her happiness departed.

"I am Vetal Beaulieu's daughter, sir."

"You think that all his money has gone to you?" he persisted.

"I—I have not thought," she stammered. She did not tell him that she had not dared to think concerning that loathsome spoil of broken laws and usury and sodden drunkenness. "I have left my business in the hands of Notary Pierre Gendreau, sir."

"It is much money," he said, his voice lower. "It should be yours, for you are his daughter—there is no one else in his family. You will be very sad, Mam'selle, eh, if all that good money goes into the pocket of a scamp, a vagabond—the money that is rightfully yours, for you are Vetal's only child? Ah, it is not right to take money away from the lawful and only heir, no matter what foolish thing may be done in anger when a father is not himself!"

He eyed her keenly. She did not reply. She did not understand to what this preface tended.

"I can tell you something for your interest, Mam'selle. I have been thinking much of it. I have been waiting long, for I wanted to do right. I will go straight to what I have to say: One night in my tavern Vetal Beaulieu made his will. All his money was to go to David Roi if that same David Roi made you his wife within the year. Roi has another wife. He will not do that. Vetal Beaulieu, your father, he stamped along the floor and said that if Dave Roi was not man enough to get you, and you were the undutiful girl so that you would not marry the man he had picked out, then he would have his money go to the bad place—he would have it wasted by a vagabond, thrown away—anything! So he willed that money to the rogue, the fiddler, the old loafer, Anaxagoras Billedeau."

The girl had sunk down on her knees beside the basket of roses. Her hands were clutching each other, her lips were apart.

"Are you sure of that, Monsieur?" It was the merest faint breath of a whispered query, but he heard the words and smiled, for this seemed like caution.

He tapped his thick finger on his breast, once, twice, thrice.

"I am sure of it, because I have the will. Vetal Beaulieu put it into my safe."

There was silence. He shifted his feet uneasily, for she was staring at him with eyes he could not understand.

"What have you to say to me, Mam'selle?"

The craft of that deeper femininity stirred in her—woman's wonderful weapon in times of stress.

"You are a man. You are wiser than a girl. What shall be done, Monsieur?"

He peered at her for some time, suspicion restraining him, greed inciting him.

"I can go to the law's officers with the will, Mam'selle. That is one way. I can give the paper to the law, and the fiddler will get all that money to waste—take it away from you who deserve to have it."

He waited, but she did not speak.

"You are wiser," she murmured, her eyes searching his.

"Or I can give the hateful will to you, Mam'selle. For—" he hesitated for a moment—"it belongs to you. It shall be for you to say, when you have it in your hands. I shall then take no further heed of it, I shall have done my duty. That is the way I shall feel."

"Then give the will to me."

"For one thousand dollars I will give it to you," he declared, emboldened by that sudden gleam in those eyes of hers. He believed that he had seen the gleam of avarice. "I will give it to you and forget forever. I swear it."

"I have not one thousand dollars, Monsieur. Notary Pierre has all my affairs in his hands."

She rose from beside the basket. Resolve animated her.

"You shall come with me to the notary."

He reflected a moment. He could see no danger for himself. At the most she could only surrender the will to the law. But he had little faith in the incorruptibility of human nature, had Felix Cyr, Bullhead Cyr! He believed he understood that glint in her eyes. Much money was at stake. Was it likely that this girl would tamely surrender this fortune to an old fiddler—a girl who could so easily be the richest girl on the border?

"Yes, I will go to the notary," he told her.

They walked down the hill together, crossed the square, and entered Notary Pierre's office.

She went straight to the old man's table, and he raised inquiring eyes over his horn spectacles.

"Monsieur Cyr has my father's will," she stated. "He will show it to you. You shall say whether it is lawful and real."

Cyr looked startled and was suddenly suspicious.

"This is Notary Pierre Gendreau," Evangeline cried, turning to the publican. "He has my money—all my affairs. He is a man of the law. But he will do as I say, for he is my close friend. He will understand. Give the will to him."

The notary took the paper and perused it. In the silence of the room only the crackling of the paper and the old man's startled mutterings could be heard.

"It is signed, sealed, and witnessed—it is his will—it is correct," he said, turning pitying gaze on the girl.

The color came into her cheeks again. Her eyes shone. Joy radiated from her. She became like one who had long faced bitter doubt and now found her path cleared.

"What does the law do when a will is right and correct, Notary Pierre?" she asked.

"The will is probated; the true heir receives, Mam'selle."

"I put it in your hands, into the hands of the law, sir. I am done with it—and I thank the good God who has lifted this burden from me."

She turned at the door.

"I think Monsieur Cyr deserves generous reward for bringing this paper to us, Notary Pierre. Out of your kindness, out of my father's money pay him well. That is all I ask—nothing for myself."

She left the two men staring at each other.

In the sacristy of the little parish church of Attegat there was a wedding that evening, just after the dusk

had deepened and the purple shadows had faded from the domed hills. The little priest walked from the stone house, a new cassock dragging on his heels; and the patriarch walked with him, hands behind his back.

In the dusk, from Madame Ouillette's, came Aldrich and Evangeline; and they met the little priest and the patriarch at the door of the sacristy, and the four went in together. There were no others. It had been planned that way. For the shadow of Vetal Beaulieu's death still hovered over their joy, and it had seemed best to take only the few into their confidence. Their own hearts could ring the peal; their own souls could sing the songs.

So they were married!

The priest and the patriarch went back to the stone house.

Hand in hand, the groom and the bride crossed the square to take the lane which led to the meadows beside the river. That bit of journey, in the glory of the stars of June, was to be their honeymoon trip; a few hours together in the peace of the meadows.

In front of one of the little houses, just off the village square, they spied a dusty buckboard with dished wheels; and from within doors sounded the plaintive notes of a fiddle.

"It is Anaxagoras Billedeau," whispered Aldrich.

His wife halted him. She put her arms about his neck and kissed him, delicious preface of a request.

"Will you go and fetch Billedeau, dear? Ask him to walk with us into the meadows. I have something to tell him—to tell you. I have been waiting to tell it to you."

The fiddler came out into the evening, wondering. He carried his fiddle, hurrying forth when he understood that Aldrich had summoned him. He trudged behind them

till they came to the willows. The great river was close to their feet as they sat there. Its waters swept the near shallows with the rustling sound of silk.

She told them—her husband and Anaxagoras Billedeau—of the visit of Felix Cyr. She related briefly and simply what had happened; she did not color the narration with expressions of joy or regret.

After she had finished, Aldrich leaped to his feet. He raised his wife and drew her close to him.

"So I come to you, my husband, with empty hands and a full heart," she said, before his lips had found hers.

"I have not dared to speak of that thing—that money—to you, my wife! I could not speak of it! I could not ask you to give up what was yours. But, oh, don't you realize what this means to me? When a man loves a woman, half the joy of loving her is taken away from him if he cannot work for her, give all to her, be all to her! It's the law of love between man and woman. Some try to deny, but they find the heartaches just the same. Thank God, I need not share with another in doing for you, my Evangeline! These two hands are yours, and from these two hands shall come that which makes life sweet. I'm your husband now—all that the word husband means! That money frightened me. Come to me now, rich in love and confidence. Oh, my rich wife!"

Many minutes passed before they gave thought to the presence of Anaxagoras Billedeau.

He was on his feet, clasping his fiddle to his breast, trying hard not to stare at this scene of rapture, but blinking side glances while he waited in an agony of panic.

"Ah, I salute you and compliment you, Anaxagoras," cried Aldrich. "You are the rich man of the border. You have plenty of money now."

"That is not so," declared the fiddler, choking.

"Here, don't you realize that you are doubting my wife's word?—my wife, understand! We have just been married, Billedeau! Have you not heard what she said? I say, you are a rich man."

The fiddler straightened. He squared his shoulders.

"I was chosen by the great Representative Clifford to carry the message to the reverenced bishop. I went. I suffered. I had money, then, for a time. That money was ever a terror by night and a burden by day. I, who have always loved men, drew aside from them when that money was in my pocket. It made life bitter. Do you think I shall now be the rich man and go along the border and be hated by all, while I fear all? Shall I spoil all the short time that is left to me in this life? No!" He waved his old fiddle above his head. His voice rose till its tones cracked in anger and protest and frightened grief. "By holy Saint Xavier, I will not be so abused!"

In all the years no one ever before had seen such anger on the face of Anaxagoras Billedeau or heard such passion in his tones.

He was now fairly at bay. His lips were rolled from his teeth; he beat the fiddle frantically about his head, as though warding off some terrible thing.

Aldrich went to him, pressed his hands on the shoulders of the rusty old coat, and urged the fiddler until he sat down on the grass. Aldrich sat beside him, and Evangeline kneeled on the other side and took Billedeau's hand.

"Listen, Billedeau, we shall understand this thing! You must not think you are to carry all that money in your pocket—all the money of a rich man. But, as you have gone up and down the land in your buckboard, have you not often wished you could help the poor people even more than you helped them by the merry tunes from your fiddle?"

"Yes, you have wished so, Monsieur Billedeau," cried Evangeline. "For did not you tell me on the long road that you would like to see curtains in the windows of the little houses and ribbons for the hair of the children on the feast days? Ah, yes, you said that the poor people needed something more than pork and corn-meal—they needed and they longed for things for the soul as well as for the stomach, for they are French people. You said all that to me, and you told me you would go about here and there and give such gifts if you were the rich man."

"There have been many losses in the valley, Billedeau," said the husband, on the other side. "The poor people need furniture and a loan here and there for lumber for new houses. You need not carry much money in your pocket. Notary Pierre understands all the business. He is faithful and honest. You can search among the people for those who need. Then you can go to Notary Pierre and say, 'I will take such and such of that money that you and I hold as trustees in behalf of the soul of Vetal Beaulieu, who is now sorry.' Yes, Anaxagoras, that will be it! You shall be a trustee. It shall be for Vetal Beaulieu's soul! You shall return the money to the poor people carefully, thriftily, and faithfully. Come to me for advice—go to Père Leclair. We all can help you."

"And I shall be glad every day, Monsieur Billedeau, because my father's money is doing good through your hands," said Evangeline, pressing the fiddler's palm. "I ask you to do this, good friend! For my sake do this!"

"It is a great work—a holy task," faltered Billedeau, at last. "Forgive me. I was angry. I did not understand. I was afraid. It was said the money was for me. It is for the poor people, eh?"

"It is yours, so that you may help the poor people as you ride here and there," said Aldrich.

"I do not pray God to give me wisdom in that work—I have no head for wisdom," confessed the old man. "I will ask you and Père Leclair and the notary for wise advice. On that I shall depend. But I will sit here for a time and ask God to give me many more days among my poor people so that I may perform this holy task."

The man and wife heard the strains of the old fiddle singing softly in the dusk behind them as they walked hand in hand up the lane from the meadows; walked from under the stars to rest under the roses with which Madame Ouillette had decked their new home.

THE END